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by **DANIEL WINTERS**

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EH? THANKS



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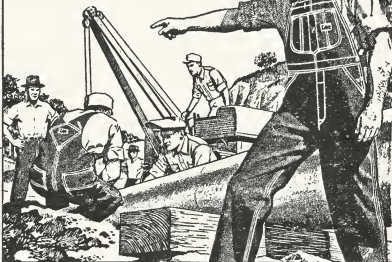
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NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

Vol. 15

Contents for September, 1950

No. 2

FOUR BIG NOVELS

- CALL ME KILLER**.....Daniel Winters 10
Where murder stalked its endless beat they met—the girl without hope, the cop without a case—and a corpse without a name—save on Satan's roster!
- NIGHT BEFORE MURDER**.....Joel Townsley Rogers 38
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She was the most beautiful girl McQuarrie had ever seen—dead or alive!
- THE BIGGER THEY ARE**.....D. L. Champion 104
He's the toughest little watchcharm dick that ever cracked a murder case—meet Ballantine Buckingham, the guy too tiny to kill!

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TRAIN IN MIAMI—AIR CAPITAL OF THE WORLD



THE WITNESS CHAIR

PULL UP an electric chair and sit down, all you friends of the blood and carnage business. It's time once again for our regular session in the archives of crime, when you take over to prove that the truth is very often as fascinating and a good deal stranger than fiction in matters criminal.

We've got lots of grave business to attend to this time, since you've sent in items dealing with crime from medieval times right through to the present, so let's get right to your cross examination.

We lead off our illegal procession with this bit about a particularly ingenious death maker:

Dear Editor:

La Magdalene, member of the famous

(Continued on page 8)

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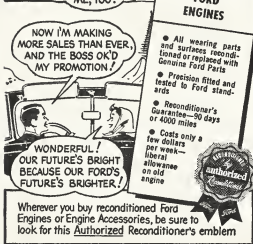
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 8)

Cartouche Gang which murdered and looted in 18th century France, was given the distinction of a very special execution. He died under the water-ruff—a leather neck piece which went up above his eyes and was arranged to hold water. The executioner poured a pint of water into the ruff at a time La Magdalene swallowed as rapidly as he could in order to prevent suffocation, but the eighth pint killed him.

Bill Forman,
Omaha, Nebraska

There's always been a source of attraction to the clever lawbreaker—funny money:

Dear Editor:

The Puritans were not always so guileless as they have been painted. Early colonists in America not only broke treaties, but even robbed the Indians by counterfeiting the native currency—wampum. Instead of mother-of-pearl, they used porcelain or bone to produce the bogus wampum. By 1650, the practice was so prevalent that the New Amsterdam Council was forced to pass an ordinance forbidding it.

Sean O'Brien,
Haverhill, Massachusetts

Our travel department this time concerns Evarts, Kentucky, where they feature blue grass and green police chiefs:

Dear Editor:

Evarts, Kentucky, had a wave of police trouble a few months ago. Two chiefs of the local force found things so tough that they resigned. Another was killed, a fourth was wounded. And the fifth chief in as many months was convicted of manslaughter.

Newspapers printed stories about the plight of the town and more than 200 applications for the job poured in. One came from a New Yorker who offered to outshoot all the *hombres* aroundabouts, and another came from a 41-year-old housewife of Lexington, Ky.

Samuel Mangrum,
Louisville, Kentucky

From Philadelphia comes this story of the inside job to end all inside jobs:

Dear Editor:

Few U. S. counterfeit deals have been so extensive as the Philadelphia-Lancaster conspiracy, in 1900. But the principals were eventually arrested and jailed.

A year later, Treasury experts were baffled by new activity on the part of passers.

(Continued on page 130)

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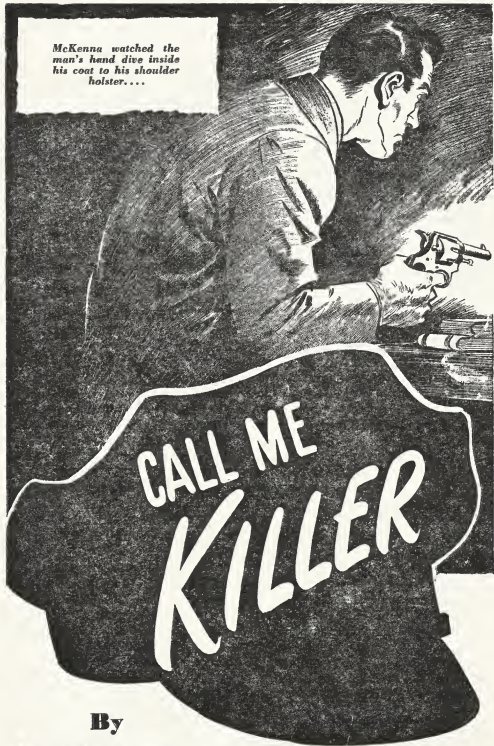
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*McKenna watched the
man's hand dive inside
his coat to his shoulder
holster...*



By

Daniel Winters



CHAPTER ONE

Corpse With No Name

THE girl was very beautiful and she was dead. The handle of the knife was almost the same color as her dress and protruded from her left side. She was sitting in the back of the cab.

McKenna said, 'How long has she been here?'

*Where murder stalked its endless
beat they met—the girl without
hope, the cop without a case—and
the corpse without a name—save
on Satan's roster!*

One of the patrolmen said, "Maybe ten minutes. The cabby says he just drove up here, turned around, and there she sat. He picked her up over on the west side. There was a man with her, but when he got here the guy had gotten out of the cab. There was just the girl sitting there."

McKenna turned to the cab driver, a small and frightened man. His hack license said his name was Harry Felder. His eyes were as big as billiard balls. He said, "She gets in the cab with this guy, over on West Fifty Sixth. The guy tells me to come right here, at the end of the street, they want to look at the river. I haul up here, turn around, and the guy is gone. He must have walked out when we were stopped for a light. I figure the babe is drunk and try to wake her up." He looked at the blood on his hand in dismay. "The guy musta struck her. She sure ain't doin' that to herself."

"You hear anything they said?" McKenna asked.

The cabby shook his head. "I don't listen. The girl looks a little worried when they get in. Pale sort of. Like she might be sick. But I don't hear anything they say."

"You don't pay much attention to a fare, do you?"

The cabby said, "Most of the time, yeah. I hear some funny stuff. But not today. Today I'm worried. This morning my wife goes to the hospital and I don't know yet whether it was a boy or a girl or a bird. I'm worried, Lieutenant, so I don't pay them much mind."

McKenna said, "I'm no lieutenant. I'm a sergeant." The way the Halsey thing had gone, it didn't look as if he'd make lieutenant for another fifty years. The Inspector was really down on him.

One of the patrolmen said, "When we put the call in to Homicide, they said Inspector Finley would be over."

McKenna stared at him. "No. Not

Finley. Hell, they just sent me over."

The patrolman looked at him. "Maybe they figure an inspector is a little smarter than a sergeant."

McKenna said, "Maybe. But I'm not pounding any beat, Jack. You just don't try to be a comedian." And he thought of Finley confining along and finding him on the job. It would be rugged. Finley would certainly have something nice to say.

He reached into the cab and took the woman's purse. It held a compact, lipstick, a set of keys and a wallet. The wallet he examined with interest. Four ten dollar bills, a five and a one. And two small snapshots, both of the girl and of a young man. McKenna looked at the girl to make sure, but there could be no mistake. She was wearing a bathing suit in each picture, and McKenna thought briefly that it was a shame such loveliness had been destroyed. The man was tall, dark, good looking.

There was nothing else in the purse.

The black car hauled up, then, and Finley got out. He was a big man, red of face, quick in his manner. He looked at McKenna, shook his head slowly. "So they sent you over. Why didn't they call up a couple of Boy Scouts?"

McKenna didn't answer. Finley said, "So what goes on?"

McKenna said, "There's a knife in her side, no identification in her purse except a couple of snapshots. The cabby says she can't have been dead for more than fifteen minutes."

"How does he know? He put the knife in her?"

"Could be," McKenna said. "I haven't had time to check him."

Finley nodded. "Just like the Halsey thing. You didn't have time to check that Watkins, and now he's someplace in Europe. And very happy about it." He looked at the girl. "Get that over to the Medical Examiner's office as soon as the

cab is photoed and checked for prints. Bring the driver over to Homicide. Maybe he can remember a few things. And don't lose either the driver or the girl. Understand?"

McKenna said, "Yes, sir." He could feel his ears glowing like traffic signals.

Finley left, and McKenna went to work with the patrolmen.

In two hours things had assumed some sort of shape. The cabby had been thoroughly checked. He was an honest man who had performed his job for ten years without untoward incident, and there was no reason to suspect that his story was not the truth. The girl's clothing was being checked for laundry and cleaning marks, and McKenna was on the street with one of the photographs that had been in the wallet. The cab driver had taken him to the spot where he'd picked up the fare, and from there he was on his own.

The restaurant where the man and girl had entered the cab was a large place and no one there remembered the pair, which was not unusual. McKenna showed the snapshot to the headwaiter, the cashier, several of the waiters. None of them could give any information. One waiter said yes, he'd served them, but he had never seen them before, they were not regular customers.

McKenna started to work. It was logical to believe that if they had eaten in this neighborhood, it probably had not been the first time. He started checking. He hit restaurant after restaurant. He remembered how the girl had been dressed and confined his first searching to the better places. He hit bars and restaurants until his feet and legs ached and he wished that he'd joined the fire department instead. He thought of the Inspector, sitting back at his fine desk, waiting impatiently for some information. He carried on.

He spent five hours finding out exactly nothing, then called in. They switched

him to Finley and he made his report.

"Nothing?" the inspector said. "Just about what I expected from you. And I don't know anything, McKenna. You won't get any information jawing with me. Get going."

McKenna hung up, smarting, then called the lab. Yes, they had cleaners' marks from the girl's clothing. They had a couple of men checking them right now. They'd know more in the morning. He should call them.

He made a few more stops and didn't do himself a bit of good. This was a girl no one had ever seen.

He was probably wasting his time, he knew. The girl might be from out of town, easily enough. Might have come in to meet this guy, then they'd gone for the cab ride and he'd stuck her. For any of a number of reasons. You couldn't call shots like that. Not when you didn't even know who the hell the girl was.

He called it quits near midnight and went home. He had furnished the three-room apartment nicely, and it assumed a note of cheer as he turned on some lights. He bought himself a drink and sat in the big easy chair and thought about the day.

The job was a tough one and would likely lead nowhere, and it was on the teletype now, he knew, and reprints had been made of the snapshots for distribution to the police of other cities. The things would be run into the ground, but probably not by him, McKenna knew. There was too little to work on.

He undressed and showered, and tiredly toweling himself, he glanced in the big mirror on the bathroom door. Tall, lean, big in the shoulders, thirty-two years hadn't treated him too badly. The nose had been broken but set pretty well, and no one would ever call him beautiful. He bowed to the mirror. It wasn't much, but it would have to do.

He put on pajamas and slowly finished his drink. He thought about the girl in

the cab, the girl he knew no more about now than when he had first seen her. He tried to build some line of investigation, but that was impossible, since he had no idea who she was, what she was like, what she had done. But it was a sorry end for a lovely woman.

He went to bed, his weariness accepting sleep easily.

IN THE morning the laboratory had some news for him. The cleaning marks had been traced to a shop up on the West Side, and they gave him the address. There would be another man working on the case with him, Porter, and he was to meet Porter at the cleaning shop.

He didn't like it. He didn't like Porter. There was nothing definite in it, nothing extremely personal, but Porter just wasn't his type of person. He'd been around often enough, though he'd never worked with him. Porter was a smooth guy. Tall, dark, good looking and always very well-dressed, Porter was sharp. He'd done some good work, some fast thinking, but McKenna had seen some of the other work he'd done, which had not been smooth, on people who had been reluctant to talk. Behind the smiling good looks of the man was something that McKenna did not like, that frightened him. He didn't like to work with Porter.

Well, if they wanted to put Porter on it with him, there wasn't much he could do. He was in no spot to kick. Not the way he stood with Finley at the moment. He'd have to take Porter and like it. Maybe he wouldn't have to like, but he sure as hell had to take Porter. This was probably Finley's idea. Porter was Finley's idea of a good cop. And maybe Finley was right.

He went up to the address he'd been given, and Porter was already there, talking to the shop owner. He turned as McKenna came in, nodded and said, "Hello,

Mac. Just got here myself. Some deal."

"You learn anything?"

Porter turned to the proprietor. "Tell him again. Maybe you'll remember something this time."

The owner was a small and worried man. He looked again at the snapshot Porter had obviously put on the counter.

"A nice girl. Very quiet and nice. Always brought her own things in and then came and picked them up herself. Sometimes I don't bother asking the name. I just give the customer a ticket and keep the duplicate. They're numbered. Like with her. I never knew her name, where she lived. She'd just drop in once in a while with a dress, ask when it would be ready, then come back for it."

Porter said, "It's a sloppy way of doing business."

"For ten years I been doing it. Never lost a dress yet. Never lost an article of clothing, Lieutenant."

"It's a bad habit," Porter said. "You could have saved us a lot of trouble."

McKenna said, "You're sure that's the girl?"

The man nodded. "No mistake. She's been in four, five times. No more."

"When was the first time?"

"Maybe two, three months ago. No longer. A new customer."

"Not any more," Porter said. "She won't want any more dresses cleaned."

The man said, "She's in trouble? A nice girl like that?"

Porter shook his head. "She's in no trouble. She'll never be bothered by anything again."

McKenna told the shop owner. "You check on your records and see if you can't find a name or an address for us. We'll be back."

They went out into the street, and Porter said. "It never happens the easy way. Maybe sometime it will. Maybe sometime I'll run across a stiff with a knife in her side, and you open the handbag and there

is positive identification and an address. You go to the address and there is a guy looking wild-eyed, and he says to you 'I did it. She was trailing around with some other slob and I gave it to her. Here is the sheath for the knife!' Then you go home and go to bed, and the next morning the inspector says, 'Fine work.' Why doesn't it happen like that?"

"It looks like a little door to door," McKenna said. "This is the neighborhood, so I guess we just start flatfooting it."

"With my corns," Porter said. "She could have been more considerate. She could at least have left her name with the cleaner. She's no help at all."

They split the neighborhood into sections and set out, agreeing to meet at noon, to call in if they got anything definite.

By noon McKenna had found nothing. He'd been in restaurants, bars, drug-stores, groceries, apartment houses. No one knew the girl.

He met Porter at the restaurant they'd agreed upon. It was easy to see that the man had been no more successful than himself. He sat in a booth, smoking a cigarette, and he looked up at McKenna with those cold blue eyes.

"The same fine luck I had, eh?"

McKenna sat down. "You didn't think we'd find out about her in an hour, did you? Hell, this is a big neighborhood. They'll have twenty cops going through these buildings tomorrow. And for all we know, she might have moved within the last few weeks and no one'll remember her."

"You're just a bundle of cheer," Porter said. "Why the hell couldn't the guy have waited until night, then chucked her in the river? If he'd timed it right, the tide would have taken her out and no one would have been bothered."

McKenna looked at him, disliking him. "Well, he wasn't that obliging. It just means we have to sweat for our pay."

"It wouldn't have made any difference

to the babe whether we sweat or not."

"That's right," McKenna said. He was thinking of the girl, now, wondering what she had done to rate such a shabby finish. She hadn't looked. . . . But you couldn't go by that. Some of the worst ones looked like angels.

He had a sandwich and a glass of milk. "You call in?" he asked Porter.

Porter shook his head. "I don't like to bother them unless I have something."

"Maybe they have something new," McKenna got up, went to a phone booth and made his call. There was no new development. He went back to the booth. "No help. We look again. I'll meet you back here in about four hours, okay?"

Porter said, "Yeah. And be a good gent. Find out who she is, who the guy is, and bring him in."

"Sure," McKenna said. "Anything to oblige."

He went into the warm sunlight again, took up where he had left off. It was half past one. Four more hours of fruitless searching would be just about enough.

It was three o'clock when the bartender looked at the snapshot, scratched his ear and said, "Yeah, I seen this babe around. She was in here only a couple nights ago. She comes in two, three times a week." He looked up. "She in trouble? She didn't look like trouble."

McKenna shook his head. "We're just checking on her."

He was close, he knew. Probably on the right block. If she came in two or three times a week, he was mighty close.

CHAPTER TWO

Let's Talk Murder

THE big apartment building was only four doors away. He saw the elevator operator first, showed him the snap, and the man said, "Why, sure. That's Miss Fleming. Lives in 14 H.

Haven't seen her around today though."

McKenna found the superintendent, showed his credentials, was taken up to 14H and admitted by a passkey. The superintendent stood by for a moment, then said, "I've got a lot of things to do. I suppose it'd be all right if I left you here alone."

McKenna looked at him. "I'm not going to steal the furniture. It'll be all right."

The man said, "I didn't mean—okay. Let me know if you want anything else."

"I will," McKenna said, then forgot about him as the door closed.

The apartment was furnished in quiet good taste and silently testified to the fact that Miss Fleming was the sort of person she seemed to be, both in the snaps and in the cab, dead, with a knife in her side. There was no ostentation, the decor was subdued yet colorful. The books in a case along one wall of the living room reflected the intelligence of the reader.

McKenna started on the desk. There were various bills addressed to Miss Sarah Fleming, and he knew it wouldn't be long now. A bundle of letters postmarked Canton, Ohio, the girl's Social Security card and expired operator's license.

Within three minutes he knew that Miss Sarah Fleming came from Canton, that according to the dates on the letters, she had been in New York for approximately two years, that she worked for a firm named Bennett and Caples, in Wall Street.

It was enough to go on. He looked for and found the phone, was just about to call Homicide when the doorbell rang. He set down the phone again and went to the door, opened it.

The girl was tall and dark, dressed smartly, good looking with her triangular face, high cheekbones, generous mouth. Her eyes were dark and large and surprised. She said, "Hello. I'm Mary. Sarah in?"

McKenna said, "Won't you come in?" and she stepped into the small foyer.

"I called," the girl said, "but there was no answer, so I thought I'd drop up." She fumbled in her purse. "Sarah gave me a key last time I was in town, and I—"

She looked at him intently. "Is something wrong? The way you—"

McKenna said, "What is your name?"

"Mary. Mary Fleming. I'm Sarah's sister. I thought she might have mentioned me to you, so I didn't bother—"

McKenna said, "I'd think you'd better sit down, Miss Fleming," and the girl walked to a chair, sat in it gingerly, her eyes not leaving his face now.

McKenna did it as gently as possible. "Your sister has had an accident Miss Fleming. I'm from the police department." He extended his wallet, the badge showing, but she did not look at it. Her eyes were on his face, measuring his words, absorbing what he said and what he had not yet said.

She asked, "Sarah? What is it? What sort of an accident? How badly is she—"

McKenna said, "I'm afraid she's dead, Miss Fleming."

The girl jerked bolt upright in her chair, her eyes widening, her mouth opening a bit. She said, "You're joking."

He shook his head. "I wish I were. She died yesterday."

She said nothing for fully half a minute. She sat there, letting it soak in, testing it for the ring of authenticity, finally accepting it. She shook her head once in amazement, her face had lost color, but then she had it and McKenna studied her and was pleased that the thing didn't blow up around him, glad that this was not a hysterical type, but someone who would help him if she could.

"Tell me about it," the girl said.

"We don't know very much about it ourselves. As a matter of fact, until ten minutes ago we didn't know who your sister was. She was found dead in a cab last evening. She had been stabbed."

"No!" the girl said. But it was a pro-

test, not a denial of the truth. The word held shock but not disbelief. She said, "Sarah. Stabbed?"

"I'm sorry I can't be kinder about it," McKenna said. "Things like this—"

But she wasn't listening to him. She was up from the chair, pacing to the window, staring down at the living street, miles away from McKenna and this room. He spoke softly, saying meaningless things that might take the edge off sudden grief, bring this girl back to the moment not too harshly.

She came back. She returned to the chair, her eyes brimming, her mouth trembling, but under control. She said, "All right. Maybe I can make some sense now, or in a little while. What can I do to help you?"

He showed her the snapshot. She nodded. "Yes, that's Sarah."

He told her there would be, perhaps tomorrow, the matter of personal identification of the body. She would have to come down to Homicide and try to tell them what she could of her sister's life, her work, her friends. All she knew about her sister.

"Perhaps we'll be able to find the man in the picture," he said. "That would help a lot, of course, and we will. . . ."

"The man in the picture," the girl said, "is our brother James. The picture was taken almost a year ago. You won't have any trouble finding him."

McKenna said "Oh," and in the back of his mind regretted that it was a brother because it might have meant something or other if the man had been a friend, a fiance, someone she worked with. It would have been easier that way.

He said, "Suppose you tell me what you know of Sarah. Do you live here in New York?"

She shook her head. "I live in Canton, our home town. I come here occasionally, perhaps three or four times a year. I usually stay here with Sarah."

McKenna thought of his phone call, then of Finley and of Porter, still searching the houses, the stores. He said, "You'll have to excuse me, Miss Fleming," and made his call.

They put him through to Inspector Finley and it was very satisfying to say, "This is McKenna. I've found the girl's apartment, her name, who she works for."

Finley's voice was wry. "And aren't you the bright little lad, though? Now if you can just find out who killed her, everything will be just fine. I don't suppose you know that? Or where we can lay hands on the man in the snapshots?"

"That's her brother," McKenna said. "James Fleming."

"And just how did we find that out?" Finley wanted to know.

"The girl's sister told me."

Finley exploded. "You mean you're sitting there talking to the girl's sister? Why, damn it, McKenna, if you take more than five minutes to get down here, I'll have you pounding a beat on Staten Island so fast that—"

There was more, and when it had finished, McKenna said, "We'd better get downtown. Inspector Finley would like to talk to you."

She glanced around the apartment once, as if trying to bring back its occupant. She nodded stiffly then and stood up. She said, "All right."

He took her downtown in a cab, speaking to her without urgency, permitting her to make this adjustment at her leisure, giving her as much time as he could. He said, "I realize how you feel about this, how shocking it must be. Don't think badly of us if you're asked a lot of questions, if people seem abrupt. We want to settle this as quickly as possible, and you can be of great help."

She looked at him and nodded. "I know. I'll try to be of as much assistance as I can." She sank into a corner of the cab. "It just seems so unreal. I just got here

at noon, checked into the hotel. There was nothing to prepare me for this, nothing to lead up to it. I rang the bell of the apartment expecting to see Sarah, and you stand there and tell me she's dead. I'm just starting to believe it."

Inspector Finley was waiting for them, and after one look at Mary Fleming, he became, to McKenna's astonishment, almost gentle. He conducted the inquiry in a soft voice, was as considerate as the situation allowed. McKenna listened to the story.

SARAH had come to the city several years before. She had stage aspirations, for she really had a fine voice. Being practical, she was also prepared to earn her living by secretarial work, at which she was very efficient. Her letters to home were invariably cheerful, until very recently. On her frequent visits, Mary had noticed that her sister had seemed happy, had even spoken about several jobs she'd managed to get, singing at social gatherings, and even in a night club on two or three occasions. The tone of her letters had become strained, of late, and that was the reason for Mary's present visit.

Finley nodded. "She hadn't mentioned any of her acquaintances by name?"

Mary Fleming shook her head. "She was rather vague about the whole thing, but seemed to be hopeful. She spoke of the people she worked with and for, but that was all. If she was interested in a man, she never spoke of him."

There was a knock on the door then, and Finley said, "Come in."

A uniformed man came in. He said, "The cab driver thinks he has the man, Inspector."

Finley nodded. He turned to Mary Fleming, ignoring McKenna. "We've had the cab driver going through the gallery all day, looking at the pictures of almost every criminal we have on file. Maybe we

have something now." He told the man at the door, "Bring him up, with the picture."

And in less than a minute Harry Felder was brought into the room. He looked tired and worried. The man beside him held the file, offered it to Inspector Finley. He took it in his big hand, looked at it for a moment, then glanced at the cab driver.

"You're sure this is the man who got into the cab with the girl?"

Felder shrugged. "Sure, shmure. It looks like it might be the same guy."

"But you're not positive."

"What can you tell from a picture? My wife has a picture of herself that makes her look like Paulette Goddard. I look more like Paulette Goddard. What I say is, it might be the same guy. I didn't look good at him. Like I tell the lieutenant over there—" he indicated McKenna with a motion of his head—"I got things on my mind. I ain't in the mood to case every shmoo that gets in the hack."

"That is no lieutenant," Finley said.

"How's the wife?" McKenna asked.

The cab driver shrugged. "She's holdin' out on me. No developments."

Finley handed the file to McKenna. "It's Archie Mello. Pick him up and bring him over here. We'll arrange a lineup and see if Felder can pick him out."

McKenna looked at the file, then placed it on Finley's desk. Archie Mello. It seemed a little unlikely. Mello was large stuff.

Finley turned to the girl. "There'll be the matter of identification, Miss Fleming. We might as well get it over with now." He said to McKenna, "Get him over here right away. We'll be back from the morgue about the time you should get here. And don't lose Mello on the way."

McKenna got up and glanced at the girl. Her face was twisted by emotion, now, and he knew she dreaded the ordeal

she'd have to go through. He pitied her, but there was nothing he could do about it. He patted her shoulder. "Take it easy." It sounded banal, but there was nothing more he could say.

He went out into the street, into the early evening, and Archie Mello was on his mind, now. What would that girl have been doing with Mello? She wasn't his sort of thing at all. From what her sister had said, Sarah Fleming had been a busy, quiet girl; restrained and very respectable. Mello didn't seem to fit into any picture that included her.

He wondered where to go; to the Midnight Club, the Club Lamplight, both of which Mello owned, or to the man's house. The clubs certainly wouldn't be open yet, but Mello might be there checking receipts, getting the places ready for the evening. The Midnight Club was closest, and he headed that way.

Mello had a record, and old one that dated from the time he'd been a tough and careless punk. He'd been indicted several times but convicted only once, on an assault charge, ten years ago. He'd kept his fingers clean since then. At any rate, he'd kept them from getting squeezed. He was big now. Just how big McKenna did not know, but big.

He wasn't at the Midnight Club. The headwaiter was busy readying up the place, and he shrugged and said Mello was probably at his home. McKenna took a cab and went downtown.

Mello had cloaked himself in the respectability of Gramercy Park, and the apartment house was a cathedral to success. The doorman was adorned in splendor, even more snobbish than most of his kind. He directed McKenna to the eighteenth floor. The elevator took him up silently.

Mello apparently had the entire floor. A man in butler's clothes but with the suspicion of a cauliflower ear opened the door. His accents were scarcely British,

but he grudgingly accepted the authority of the badge McKenna showed him and admitted him to a foyer not quite as roomy as Pennsylvania Station. He said, "Wait here a minute, Mac. I'll see if the boss is in."

McKenna waited for five minutes, then Mello appeared. He was a tall man in his late thirties, dark, sleek, well-groomed. His face was handsome if you didn't look too closely at the eyes. They were cold, curious, searching. They were hard and reflected the hardness of the man himself.

Mello said, "What's on your mind?"

McKenna showed him the badge. "Inspector Finley wants to see you, down at Homicide. My name's McKenna." He measured the man, looking for the thing Sarah Fleming might have found in him and not finding it. Finding an animal magnetism, a sheathed brutality. Finding shrewdness and a cold ruthlessness, but nothing else.

"What's the beef?" Mello asked.

"A woman named Sarah Fleming was found dead in a cab yesterday. Finley thinks you might be able to help us."

Mello shook his head. "Not me. I don't know anything about it."

"Okay. But Finley'd like to see you."

Mello looked at him. "You got a warrant?"

McKenna said, "No. If you want to waste my time it'll take me a half hour to get one. Why don't you just come along?"

Mello considered it. "Wait five minutes. I'll be right with you."

McKenna sat and waited, admiring the apartment, the decorations. It was a little place you could never run on a cop's salary. It was also a place you could never run on what came out of the Midnight Club and the Club Lamplight. They would bring in money, but not this kind of money.

Mello was ready in less than the five

minutes. Beautifully dressed in a suit that must have cost him better than a couple of hundred, McKenna figured. Nice hat, hand-made shoes. Mello was doing all right for himself.

There was a nice big car waiting at the curb. Nothing flashy. As big a car as you could get, but black, as nice and quiet as any hearse.

McKenna looked at the chauffeur as he was getting in. He said to the man, "We want to go to the Homicide Bureau. I'll bet a buck you know where that is."

The man looked at him. "Another wise guy." But he got in behind the wheel and drove the car without further instructions.

Mello said, "How long is this going to take? I've got things to do."

McKenna shrugged. "It might take five minutes. It might take the rest of your life. How do I know?" He'd never met Mello before, but there was no reason why he should like him. He'd heard enough about him, had known casually a couple of cops who'd been spoiled, rotten, by Mello. Mello was on the other team.

"What makes with this babe?" Mello wanted to know. "How does Finley hook her up with me?"

McKenna shrugged. "All I know is what I hear. You'll know as much as I do in ten minutes."

Mello looked at him. "You give with a lot of information, don't you?"

"That's not my job."

"You like your job, you oughta be a bit more careful about it," Mello said. "You ought to be a little more polite."

McKenna looked at him. "When I have to be polite to people like you, then I won't want the job any longer."

"A tough cop," Mello said. "I've seen tough ones softened."

"You better save it," McKenna said. "You might need it."

"I've got everything I need," Mello said.

"You're a lucky guy."

CHAPTER FOUR

A Line on Death

AT HOMICIDE they went up to Finley's office. The inspector was there, and the girl, her eyes red-rimmed. She was shaken but still controlled. Finley didn't waste any time. He said to Mello, "You know a girl named Sarah Fleming?"

Mello said, "Yeah," and McKenna looked at him in astonishment.

"How well did you know her?"

Mello shrugged. "She came around to the club a couple of times. She wasn't bad looking and had a pretty good voice. I let her sing two, three times."

"Where were you yesterday?" Finley said.

Mello looked at him. "In Buffalo. I came back last night on the plane."

"Can you make that stick?" Finley wanted to know.

Mello nodded. "And you can check the airline. It's good." He gave the name of the airline.

"You're goin' in a lineup," Finley said. He turned to a uniformed man who stood at the door. "Take him downstairs and set it up."

Mello said, "You're doin' it the hard way, Finley. You oughta go easy."

Finley looked at him. "Sure. Maybe you're right. But get moving."

Mello shrugged. He turned and looked at Mary Fleming, and McKenna watched him measure the dark, full beauty of the girl. He felt himself moving toward Mello, then stopped. Mello went out with the uniformed man.

"We'll go down in a few minutes," Finley said. "As soon as they get it arranged. Felder will try to make the identification."

Porter came in then, tall, dark, easy-

moving. He said to McKenna, "It's lucky I called in. I'd be roaming around that district all night."

"I couldn't get word to you." McKenna said.

Porter looked at Mary Fleming. He said, "No... I guess you couldn't."

Finley said, "Porter, we're fixing a lineup downstairs. The cabby never saw you, did he?"

Porter shook his head. "I just came on the case this morning."

"Well, you better go down and help out. Get in the thing. You're about Mello's size."

Porter looked at the girl again, then at McKenna. "Okay, Inspector." He went out.

"Do you think Mello is the one?" Mary Fleming asked.

Finley shrugged his heavy shoulders. "I wouldn't know. The cab driver didn't seem very positive." He chewed for a

moment on an unlighted cigar. "It doesn't seem very likely. But on the other hand, why did Mello have to pick yesterday to be in Buffalo." He looked at McKenna. "Well, what are you standing there for? Don't you figure Mello's story ought to be checked?"

McKenna turned away to hide the color in his face. He went to a far desk and used the phone. In a moment he turned and said, "They had an A. Mello on a flight from Buffalo that got in here at ten last night."

"Certainly they had," Finley said. He turned to the girl. "We can go down, now."

The lineup was in a large room on the second floor. McKenna looked the men over. Three of them were plainclothesmen, three were men being held on warrants. Mello was the second from the left.

Felder came in. He walked over to the



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but no Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like mane... and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Looks dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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scalp feels better...
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IT'S GREAT! Try it! See what a big difference 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic makes in the good looks of your hair. Just a few drops daily check loose dandruff and those other annoying signs of Dry Scalp... spruce up your hair quickly and effectively. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients.

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Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN
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line, went down it slowly. He paused for a long moment in front of a cop named Higgins, shrugged, went down the line. He stopped in front of Mello. The man looked at him, smiling slightly. Felder moved to the last man, Porter, and paused.

He did it again, went through the same procedure. Then he turned and said to Finley, "I dunno. It might have been him," he pointed to Mello. "Or it might have been him," he pointed to Higgins. "An' then it might not have been either of them. I didn't take such a good look. He was that type, like, though."

Finley said, "All right. You want to try again?"

Felder shook his head. "This ain't no beauty contest. 'I'm not sure now, I wouldn't be any more sure in five minutes. It might be either of them guys, and it might not be. That's the best I can do."

Finley nodded. "Thanks for trying to help. If we want you again we'll get in touch with you."

They went back to his office. Mello came in, in a moment. He said, "You satisfied, Finley?"

Finley looked at him. "You can breeze, Mello, but don't get tough about it."

Mello's face assumed an expression of surprise. "Tough? Me? I just asked a question."

"Go home," Finley said. "You have a nice trip to Buffalo?"

"Fine. A good trip."

"Well, don't make any more of them for a week or so. Stay around town. We might want to talk to you."

Mello looked at the girl again. He looked at her as if he were enjoying it. Then he looked at McKenna. He said, "So long. And remember. It helps to be polite to some people."

McKenna said nothing. He watched the man go out the door.

Finley looked at him. "And now what does the mastermind detective intend to

do? What goes on in that brilliant mind?"

McKenna said, "Give me a couple of days. I'd like to look around." He looked at Porter, but the big man said nothing.

Finley spread his hands. "Of course! All the time in the world, McKenna! We're in no hurry here. You know that." Then he leaned forward on the desk. "You'd better come up with something, McKenna. Something good. Those goats out on Staten Island would like you."

McKenna took the girl to her hotel. She said, "I've arranged to have Sarah... go home."

"You're going with her?"

She shook her head, her eyes averted. "No. I'd like to see this thing through. I'd like to help, if I can. I want to see the end of it."

He took her to dinner, saw that she had a few drinks, enough to help her go to sleep. He talked with her, admiring her courage, the control she exercised upon her emotions. And he found that his interest in her was not entirely impersonal, not limited to the confines of the case. Her warm loveliness, the puzzled sorrow in her eyes, did things to him that did not ordinarily occur in the line of duty. He left her with a promise to call in the morning.

WHEN he left her he went to the Midnight Club. Mello might be as clear as a June sky, but there would be no harm in looking things over. The man had admitted knowing Sarah Fleming. It would have been useless to deny it, if she had sung at his club. He'd been smart enough to see that. Mello was smart enough to see a lot of things, McKenna knew.

The Midnight was a garish layout, full of noise and of people who had a lot of money to spend. McKenna took a table against a wall and watched a show that was a combination of double-entendre comedians, scantily dressed and beautiful

girls, a loud band. He had a couple of drinks.

He bought a pack of cigarettes and tipped the girl a dollar. She smiled and raised her eyebrows appreciatively, and McKenna said, "Is there a girl named Sarah Fleming who sings here?"

There was something hidden in the girl's smile. "Sings here? Are you kidding, mister?"

He shook his head. "Someone was telling me—"

She grinned at him. "It wasn't me that was telling you anything, mister. Not little Gertrude." She moved away slowly on long, slim legs.

He didn't stay long. When he left he went over to the *Standard* offices. It was a morning paper and there was a chance that Willie Payton would still be around. He found Willie slapping at a typewriter.

Willie looked up. "Mac! Good to see you. What are you doing out this late?"

"Want to catch up on a little news, Willie." He sat on the edge of the desk. "What do you know about a girl named Sarah Fleming." Willie had his fingers on the most obscure sort of news.

Willie rubbed his chin. "Sarah Fleming. The name doesn't set any bells ringing, Mac."

"She sang a couple of times at Archie Mello's Midnight Club."

Payton looked at him. "Hell, yes. I didn't get it at first. Yeah, she sang a couple of times all right."

"What else?" McKenna asked.

Payton shrugged. "She's Mello's girl. The voice wasn't too good. Not bad, but not quite good enough. But the rest of it couldn't be topped. Very lovely."

McKenna stared at him.

Payton said, "Mac, you're a big boy, now. You know how these things go." Then he said, "How come you're interested?"

McKenna rubbed a hand across his face. The damndest things happened.

He should know by now never to be surprised. "She was found dead yesterday. Somebody'd shoved a knife into her."

Payton was on his feet. "How did we miss that one?! Mac, that is news! Wait'll I—"

McKenna shook his head. "Keep it under the blanket for a while, Willie. We couldn't identify the body until today, is why you didn't know."

"But Mello's girl! Hell, this is sensational! I'll get—"

McKenna said. "No. Tell me what you know about her, Willie."

He got the story the way Willie knew it, and if it wasn't exactly right, it was close enough, McKenna realized. Willie didn't make many mistakes about these things. Willie wasn't sure just when or how Mello had met Sarah Fleming, but she'd turned up one night at the club and had sung a couple of numbers. Maybe she'd just walked in and asked for a job, a chance. Willie wasn't sure. She was good, but she didn't have the professional touch. Maybe Mello had met her just like that. But the acquaintance had quickly become attachment, and it had lasted for months, which was a little unusual for Mello.

McKenna could understand it, now that he knew about it. Sarah Fleming, fairly new to the city, attracted by a man who could give her a job in a night club. Attracted by Mello himself, dark, hard, handsome. All right. There it was. And no mystery about why Mello had wanted the girl. McKenna remembered that beauty, even in death.

And he wondered what Mary Fleming would make of all this. She wouldn't believe it. She wouldn't admit such a thing could happen. Then he thought about the girl and knew he was wrong. She was intelligent, not in the habit of kidding herself. She'd believe the truth.

He looked at Payton. "They been getting along all right?"

Payton shrugged. "I don't listen at keyholes, but from what I could see they were doing fine."

McKenna considered the thing. "How could I find out? Who'd really know?"

Payton dragged on his cigarette, consulted the cloud of smoke for advice. "Why don't you talk to Sally North? If you can find her."

"I never heard of Sally North."

"Mello's former. For a long time, too. She'd know, if anyone would. She's still carrying a big torch, they tell me."

"All right. Where is Sally North?"

Payton grinned. "Sally might be anyplace where there's a bottle of whiskey. I haven't seen her around since the Fleming dame took over. Wait a minute. I might be able to help."

He picked up the phone and dialed a number. He said, "Milt Prening? Willie Payton. Whaddaya know about Sally North? Where's she live, where's she do her drinking? What? Okay... You're sure that's as close as you can come? Right, Milt. And thanks a million... yeah, anything for a laugh."

He turned to McKenna. "The guy says she's living up around Seventy-second Street, on the West Side. That's all he knows. Someone saw her in a bar up there. No further dope. She starts drinking early and stays late."

McKenna nodded. "Willie, thank you. I'll give her a try."

Payton said, "When do I get the story, Mac? When can we break it?"

"Maybe tomorrow. Maybe in a week. But you'll be the first, Willie. The very first."

Payton nodded. "It's nice to be talking to someone you can believe. If I get anything else, I'll let you know."

McKenna went out on the warm street and looked at his watch. It was almost two o'clock and he was tired. Tomorrow would be another day. No one was going anywhere. Not Sarah Fleming. Not

Archie Mello. It would all wait a while.

He called Mary Fleming's hotel in the morning, at ten o'clock. Her voice was subdued but friendly. She said that Detective Sergeant Porter was there at the moment, and that in a few minutes they were going to have breakfast and then go down to Sarah's employers, Bennett and Caples, to see if there was anything to work on from that angle.

McKenna did a slow burn. He asked if he could talk to Porter. Porter got on the phone.

Porter said, and McKenna could see his smirk, "This is a very interesting case, Sergeant McKenna, and one which I think will take a great deal of time on my part."

McKenna said, "Look, Porter. If you—"

Porter interrupted him. "The Inspector told me all about the late developments this morning, McKenna, and from here I'm going to give it a great deal of attention, I assure you. Keep in touch with me, McKenna."

McKenna said, "Wait a minute, you slob. I'll be—"

But he was talking into a dead phone.

HE WENT looking for Sally North. On 72nd Street West there are a lot of bars, and he hit them slowly, methodically. One bartender was responsive.

"Yeah," the man said. "Miss North usually comes in here about noontime. Likes my whiskey sours. Ain't been in for a couple of days."

"Where does she live?"

The man shook his head. "I wouldn't know. She spends a lot of her time right here, though. You might as well wait."

McKenna waited. Through noon and through one o'clock. It was almost two when the woman came in and sat at the end of the bar. The bartender winked at McKenna and went up to serve her.

McKenna looked the girl over carefully.

She was a beautiful woman. In her late twenties or early thirties, liquor had loaded years onto her handsome, once-proud shoulders. Whatever she had been originally, she was now screamingly blonde. The fine bone structure of her face could still defeat the ravages of dissipation. Her eyes were bloodshot-blue. The mouth was beautiful but loose. She was dressed well.

McKenna let her have two drinks before he moved in. He motioned to the bartender to set up one for the lady and one for himself, walked up to the end of the bar.

He said, "Pardon me, but aren't you Sally North?"

She looked at him coolly enough, now that the morning whiskey had stabilized her. "That's no AP dispatch, mister. I've known it for a long time."

"I thought I'd seen you once or twice at the Midnight Club."

She looked at him again and shook her head. "I didn't see you. I'd remember that face. They'd never call you pretty, but I'd remember it. It's got a little something or other I like."

They had two drinks, a third and a fourth. McKenna talked of bands and singers, of the few night club personalities that he knew, keeping the conversation in her plane. The woman was pleasant enough, fully informed on the subjects he touched, and obviously did not resent his intrusion upon her privacy.

He chose what he thought was the appropriate moment. "Did you ever hear a singer named Sarah Fleming? She was on a couple of times at the Midnight Club."

She looked at him for a long moment. Her voice was low. "What are you feeding me, mister? You trying the needle department?"

He tried to seem puzzled. "What do you mean?"

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"You've been around, you know the score. You know damn well I've heard of Sarah Fleming. Now all you have to do is go to Sarah Fleming and ask her if she's ever heard of Margie Manning."

He shook his head. "Who is Margie Manning?"

"It's like a ball game," the woman said. "Sarah Fleming substitutes for Sally North. Margie Manning goes in for Sarah Fleming. The coach does it all from the bench." She took a long drink. "Sometimes you can't figure the reason. Maybe he gets a little tired of the way you wear your hair. Maybe you say something that doesn't set right with him. Maybe he just gets tired of you. I guess that's the real reason." She looked at him. "Yeah, I heard Sarah Fleming. At the Midnight Club and a couple of other times."

"I just wondered," McKenna said.

The woman stared at him, then shook her head. "You weren't just wondering, you were asking. What do you know about Sarah Fleming?"

McKenna shrugged. "I knew her in school. We're from the same town. Canton. She's a nice girl."

Sally North took a long drink. "That she might be, or might have been. But you don't stay nice very long when you're hooked up with Archie Mello."

The liquor was getting to her now, McKenna saw. Her voice was thickening almost imperceptibly, she dropped her cigarette to the bar, fumbled for it again.

McKenna picked up the box of matches she had been using and lit the cigarette for her. He fingered the matches absently, then his attention was riveted to them. On them was a picture of a hotel, and underneath the print read: HOTEL LAMMONT, BUFFALO'S FINEST. 500 ROOMS WITH BATH.

He put them carefully on the bar again. It could mean nothing, he knew. The boxes were distributed for advertising all

over the country. But it was a coincidence.

"Mello's a louse," she said. "But a good looking louse. And as long as women are stupid, he'll get along." She dragged reflectively on the cigarette. "But maybe this Fleming kid isn't stupid. Maybe she's not as stupid as I was. Just maybe."

McKenna ordered another drink. "How do you figure that?"

She looked at him, grinning a little crookedly. "I hear things. I got a hole in my head as big as a silver dollar, but sometimes I hear things."

He let her drink, and she continued with the thing herself, without prompting. "Like when I call Mello. I can't get the bum out of my mind, and every once in awhile when I have a load on I call him on the phone. It's like a disease, and up to now I haven't met the right doctor." She laughed. "I might have him now, but I'm not sure."

"I don't know Mello," McKenna lied.

"A very nice fellow," Sally North smiled. "Very nice. As long as he isn't tired of you. Then out you go." Her lips pursed reflectively. "But maybe not this Fleming kid. Maybe she's a little smarter. But maybe she's too smart. She's got a lot of nerve, I'll say that."

McKenna said something noncommittal, and the girl poked his arm. "Know what I heard? I call Mello one day and he's giving me the slow brushoff, and this Fleming kid must be in the room and she gets sore because he's talking to another dame. I guess she can see the payoff coming. Mello doesn't hang up on me. He says to wait a minute, then he puts the phone down to argue with her. I hear plenty." She laughed briefly.

"Was he sore?" McKenna asked.

"She was sore. She tries to scare him. She says she's got enough on him—he's deals with Haspis, Forento and that crowd, plus a couple of nice shootings—to put him away until he's ripe. She says he

better stay away from other women or she'll pop it wide open. She's written it all down in a letter, she tells him, and mailed it home. Just so that if he gives her the air and she does something foolish with herself, people will know why."

McKenna said, "You think that was smart?"

The girl shook her head. "Not that part of it. She should keep her mouth shut about what she knows. She's too young for Mello. She hasn't had enough experience to tangle with a guy like that. Maybe she's too much in love with him. But that isn't the right play. That's the way you lose teeth."

She took a drink. "But now she's out. Now this Marge Manning is in the driver's seat. Or so I hear."

She turned to him. "But let's forget about Mello. Let's talk about you. You're cute."

He glanced at the clock over the bar. "I'm cute and I'm late. I didn't know I'd been here so long. The boss'll have a fit."

Sally North said, "You coming back?"

"Sure. I'll be back."

In the beginning of drunkenness, she smiled at him. "I'll wait."

He said, "Fine," secure in the knowledge that she'd forget about him in ten minutes.

CHAPTER THREE

Grave Call

HE WENT out into the street, blinded for a moment by the sunshine. He went into a restaurant and had a couple of cups of black coffee, thought about Mello. If what the girl at the bar had told him were true, and he had no reason to doubt it, Mello was probably the man they wanted. The tie-in with Haspis and Forento had been suspected, but it was vague. They were a couple of the most important political fig-

ures in the state. The thing would be big. And Sarah Fleming, in love and desperate and woefully inexperienced in matters like this, could easily have signed her death warrant by confessing her knowledge of some of Mello's deals.

He called in to the office, and they switched him to Finley. The inspector said, "And I suppose you have the thing all tied up? A neat little parcel?"

McKenna confessed that he hadn't.

"Well, Porter has been a bit busier than you. He took a look at this Bennett and Caples outfit, and he smells something fishy there. They were mixed up in a shady stock deal, nearly a year ago, but were cleared. He thinks they're in the soup again, that the girl knew a bit too much about their business. He's checking on them now. And you've found out nothing eh?"

McKenna confessed that he had nothing definite.

"Well, tramp the streets," Finley said. "Get those big feet working. You might as well get in shape for what you'll be doing a week from now."

He hung up. McKenna had half a notion to call him back, tell him what he'd learned. But what had he learned? The ramblings of a drunken woman couldn't be depended upon.

He called the laboratory, and they had something for him. The knife had been made by a big manufacturer for the wholesale trade, a heavy kitchen knife for use in restaurants. McKenna made arrangements to have the manufacturer's sales records checked, and when the jobber was found, to have his sales traced. It might mean a lot.

A call to Mary Fleming's hotel did him no good. Miss Fleming was out.

And he knew where. Out with Porter.

He couldn't know whether or not Porter had anything substantial in the Bennett and Caples deal. There was a possibility, of course, that Sarah Fleming

had known too much about their business. But from where McKenna stood it didn't seem to jell. Her employers might be criminals, but from their choice of operating procedure, it didn't look as if they were that sort of criminals. There was too wide a difference between Wall Street and murder in a cah. They didn't go together.

But if they did. If Porter caught the girl's employers with their books hanging... if one of them had been capable of committing this deed... if Porter could hang it on them. . . .

That would be fine. That would make Finley feel just dandy. McKenna was chasing around talking to drunken women while Porter was sewing up the case. *Staten Island*, he thought, *here I come*.

He brought together what he had and tried to add it up, hut it amounted to almost nothing. Sarah Fleming had been Mello's girl. That he knew. And so had Sally North. Mello said he'd been in Buffalo the day of the murder, and that could be true. And maybe Sally North had been in Buffalo.

There were too many coincidences. Why should Mello be in Buffalo that day, as Finley had asked? And why should Sally North have a hook of Buffalo matches. Cincinnati, okay. Cleveland, okay. But why Buffalo? And did Mary Fleming know anything about a letter her sister was supposed to have written? Just how good was Mello's alibi?

It seemed that he didn't know the answers to an awful lot of questions.

He took a chance on one of them. He put in a call to the Lammont Hotel in Buffalo, spoke with the desk. He identified himself as the secretary of a Mr. A. Mello, a recent guest. Mrs. Mello, it seemed, had misplaced a small brooch. Had it been found?

He had to wait hut when the answer came, it was satisfactory. The brooch had not been found. The maid who had

cleaned the room occupied by Mrs. Mello had been questioned, and the hotel was satisfied that she had not seen the brooch.

McKenna thanked the man and hung up. Well, it established one thing, at any rate. Sally North had very probably accompanied Mello to Buffalo.

And that was something he couldn't figure. She and Mello were through, from what she and everyone else said. Why this divergence? Why would Mello soften for a short trip? It didn't add.

He thought of Mary Fleming then, and of the letter her sister had sent. He tried the hotel again. She was in.

He spoke with her pleasantly for a moment, then asked, "Do you know anything about a letter Sarah sent to you, or to some member of your family? In it she might have mentioned something about her activities here in New York that were very private. She might even have given instructions that the letter shouldn't be opened except in the event of some accident to her."

The girl seemed surprised. "No, I know of nothing like that. She wrote the usual letters, of course, but they mentioned nothing out of the ordinary. She spoke of her work, the plays she's seen—things like that. Why?"

McKenna said, "It isn't important. Just a hunch I'm following. Who else would she have written to, besides yourself?"

"James, perhaps. We're the only part of the family left. But if it were something confidential, I'm sure she would have told me, not my brother."

He agreed silently. He said, "What about dinner? Like to have it with me?"

"Well Mr. Porter said he'd phone, but—"

"There are some things I have to talk to you about," McKenna said. "Porter can wait. I know a quiet place you'll like."

He cemented it in a few moments, then hung up. It was a hell of a delicate busi-

ness. The girl had carried her grief well, up to this point, but he didn't know how much further she could go. And he didn't know how much to tell her about Sarah Fleming and Mello. He'd have to go easy for a little while. You couldn't load it on her all at once.

He thought again of Sally North. Why should she tell him such a story as she had? If she and Mello were together again, what did the tale about some imaginary Margie Manning mean? He wasn't far from where he'd left her. He walked back to the bar, hoping she was still there.

She was. She'd had a few more drinks, and while there was no difference in her outward appearance, as he sat down next to her and she smiled at him, he could sense their effect.

"Back again," he said.

"And how nice! I really didn't expect to see you."

"Let's have just a couple more before I really have to go." She was pleased at his return, he could plainly see.

They had a drink, then one more. He thought that Finley wouldn't approve of this at all. And then he thought, *The hell with Finley*. The liquor had loosened him. This was one he had to work out by himself.

He was getting a little tired of it by the time he neared the end of his second drink. Sally North was humming a tune the juke

box was playing, and he turned to her and said suddenly, "Why were you up in Buffalo with Mello the other day? I thought you were through with him."

She wheeled on him, her eyes wide, then narrowing. "Mello? I wasn't in Buffalo with Mello."

"Who were you with?"

She was a long time answering. "You're law, aren't you?"

He nodded. "You want to see the tin?"

She shook her head. "And I don't want to be mixed up with anything Mello's been dealing. You just ask Joe Porter, at Homicide, who I was in Buffalo with."

He said, "Porter?"

The girl said, "Ask him." She turned away, then, and when she wheeled on him again, her eyes were flooded with anger. "And don't ask me anything else, you punk."

He got out. There was nothing to be gained by staying here, he knew. He'd get no more out of Sally North.

HE WAVED at a cab, told the man to take him to the apartment, tried to put the pieces together. They didn't fit. What he needed was a shower, a change, and something to eat. First it had been Mello and Sally North, and now it was Porter and Sally North. It didn't make sense.

And when they were almost to his

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place, it occurred to him that a little talk with Mello might bring things more clearly into focus. He gave the driver the Gramercy Park address.

He was a half block from the house when he noticed Mello's big black sedan at the curb.

And just coming out of the apartment's entrance was Joe Porter. He told his driver to turn right and stop. He watched Porter get into the big car, alone, and it pulled away from the curb and headed uptown. He told his man, "Tail that thing, but easy." He didn't want to brace Mello immediately after Porter had been there.

He followed the sedan to within a block of where he'd just left Sally North. He watched it pull in in front of the bar. That was good enough for him. He told the caddy to take him home.

The thing still didn't make sense. Porter and Mello in Buffalo at the same time. He said to himself, "Hell, it's getting to be a habit," and put in a call for the Lamont Hotel in Buffalo.

He told the operator that he was the Mr. Porter who had been in a few days ago, and that he wanted to know if, on the following Friday, he could have the same room he used before. He'd like it.

There was a long pause. Then the operator switched him to the desk and the clerk was a big apologetic. They had no record of a Mr. Porter, but they would be glad to make a reservation. If at any time....

McKenna hung up. He stared at the phone for a long moment, then went in to the kitchen and made himself a drink. Things were now beginning to make just a bit of sense. It wasn't pretty, but it was real, something you could fasten on if you dared to believe a couple of things you'd rather not. He made the drink stiff, brought it into the living room. He made another call, this time to Homicide.

He talked with Tommy Stein for three minutes and found out what he'd wanted

to know. Porter had been on sick leave for three days just before this case had broken.

He sat back and tasted the drink. It was a sour, bitter thing. He pushed it away from him just as the doorbell rang.

He opened the door, and Porter stood there, big and lounging, an easy smile on his face. He said, "Hiya, McKenna. Going to ask me in?"

McKenna grinned. "Sure. Glad to see you. How you been doing?"

Porter walked in and McKenna closed the door, trying desperately now to remember what he knew about the man, cursing himself for not having bothered to know him better. He said, "I'm just having a drink. How about one."

"Twist my arm," Porter told him. The man took a straightbacked chair near a window. "I wanted to talk to you about this Fleming business. Got a couple of angles. The drink can wait a bit."

The glass on the end table dictated where McKenna would sit. He walked to the big easy chair, sank back into it. He said, "You look into that Bennett-Caples thing?"

Porter nodded. McKenna knew the man had not taken his eyes off him from the moment he'd walked in. He said, "Yeah. There's something a little screwy going on down there. The books, on a fast look, don't seem too strictly on the level."

McKenna said, "That could mean something." He tried to keep his voice smooth and even, but he could feel the tension gathering in the room. He could feel it, actually feel it, emanating from Porter.

Porter said, his eyes unwavering, unblinking, "And I got another angle. A gal named Sally North. Used to be Mello's girl."

McKenna hoped his grin looked genuine. "A lot of women mixed up in this thing." And he could think of no one but Mary Fleming, alone in her hotel room.

And with Mello believing that her dead sister had sent her a letter opening him up like a newspaper.

McKenna said, "Wait until I get you that drink." And he got to his feet slowly, lazily, thinking of nothing but the gun in his right hip pocket, impossible to draw while he was sitting in the chair.

He was almost fully erect when the hardness came into Porter's voice. "Never mind the drink. Stay where you are, McKenna."

McKenna watched the man's right hand dive inside his coat, to a shoulder holster. That was what he had wanted to know. Just where Porter carried the gun.

His own was out now that he was on his feet and had a chance for it. He hauled it up and snapped out three as fast as he could pull the trigger. Porter's gun was in his hand but he never had a chance to use it. He sat in the chair, jerking as if he had the hiccups, and then he fell out of it sideways, staring at McKenna. The gun went skittering across the floor. McKenna walked to the man and bent over him. Porter's eyes were still cold and hard, and just before the light went out of them he said in a voice that bubbled, "McKenna, you're stupid to be so smart. McKenna, you got trouble. McKenna, you. . . ." And that was all.

McKenna wasted no time. He went out of the house fast and grabbed a cab. Porter and Mello. It was a fine team. Porter, the cool, hard, smart guy. Porter, too big for his job, and Mello trying to buy the pennant. Mello looking for the hard guys, the hungry guys. He'd got to them before and he'd got to Porter, too.

And Porter had seen Sally North, had figured immediately that it was McKenna who'd been talking to her. He'd probably called Mello and had said he was going to speak to McKenna. Mello would expect to hear from him soon.

He told the cabby, "Knock those lights over," and sat back and lit a cigarette with

hands that trembled. He pulled the gun out, spilled the empties and reloaded.

Mello and Porter. Porter, who looked so much like Mello that the cab driver, Felder, had pointed to them both in the lineup. Porter, with a three-day sick leave, going to Buffalo, registering in the hotel as Mello, not even telling Sally North about it. Porter, the smart guy, the angle guy.

HE PAID off the cab with a couple of bills, went into the house, gave the floor. He prayed that Mello was here, not someplace else. He wanted him now, before he had a chance to do any more damage.

The tin-eared butler opened the door, and McKenna thought he detected surprise in the man's eyes. He said, "I want to see Mello."

The man said, "He's not in. He's out."

"I'll wait around," McKenna said. The way things had been working, it didn't seem logical that Mello would leave until he'd heard from Porter.

The butler made no move to open the door. "He won't be back. Call him tomorrow."

McKenna raised his leg fast and kicked against the door. The door opened, the butler went flying back into the foyer. McKenna went in fast. The butler came to him crouched, hands ready, and McKenna used the foot again. The man doubled over, a long wheezing cough in his mouth. McKenna ripped the gun out and clouted him behind the ear. The man went down in a sodden heap.

The foyer led to a larger room, and McKenna entered it. It was empty. McKenna tried two doors before he found the right one.

Mello sat behind a large desk. He looked up, then smiled. "The tough cop. McKenna. The real smart boy with the big mouth."

McKenna went into the room, closed the door behind him. "Not so big," he said. "Not nearly as big as Joe Porter's mouth."

Mello said, "Why?" The dark eyes were guarded, now.

"Your boy," McKenna said. "Your stooge. The guy who went to Buffalo with your old girl friend and registered for you. While you stuck a knife into Sarah Fleming."

"You're talkin' soapuds," Mello said.

"Porter isn't. He's right down at headquarters now, talking his head off. Sally North talked first, and now Porter is trying to save himself a good suit. He doesn't want the seat of it burned off in that chair. He's in a very conversational mood. He's talking about Haspis and Forento, and about Sarah Fleming. He's just full of news."

He didn't see the start of it. Mello had been fooling with the letter opener, both hands on the desk. His arm went up fast, then came down, and the heavy blade was a glitter in the air. McKenna stepped aside and wheeled, heard the knife hit into the door behind him.

He said, "Close but no cigar, Mello." Then he walked across the room, and as Mello got to his feet McKenna belted him alongside the head with the gun in his hand. The man started to sag and McKenna slugged him again, with accuracy and with fervor. Mello hit the floor and bounced on the heavy rug. McKenna kicked him aside and sat down behind the desk.

He felt weak. His legs were watery and he couldn't get a cigarette and a match together. He finally threw them both at Mello with a curse.

He called Homicide. He asked for Inspector Finley and waited with a saint-like patience. Finally the heavy voice said, "This is Finley."

"This is McKenna," McKenna said. It sounded silly.

Finley's voice assumed the sarcastic edge. "McKenna. Well, I wondered if you were still working for us. And what brilliant little bit of news do you have for us now?"

McKenna told it straight. "Mello knifed that girl. Joe Porter was working for him. Porter went to Buffalo and registered as Mello. They look enough alike to be brothers."

Finley took a moment to ask, "Where's Porter?"

"You'll find him in my apartment. He's dead."

The pause was longer, this time. "Where are you, and where is Mello?"

"I'm at Mello's place. He's right here. I had to slug him a couple of times." Then he said, "And when he comes to, he'll talk. He doesn't know about Porter. He thinks Porter is telling the whole story, right now. He tried a knife on me but he missed."

"And what happened to Porter?" Finley asked.

"He tried a gun." It would work out, McKenna knew. A talk with Sally North, a look at Mello's books. It would all be there.

Finley said, "So you had to shoot Porter, then run down and get Mello. All by you. If McKenna, don't you know there's a police force in this city! If you're not down here in ten minutes, McKenna, I'll have you so far out in the wilds of Staten Island—"

McKenna hung up slowly. He'd wait here until Finley sent some cops over, then he'd go uptown.

And he had a date tonight. A date with a lovely girl who'd seen a great deal of trouble in two days. Maybe he'd have to make it for a bit later.

He dialed the number of the hotel. There was a lot to tell her, and he'd have to be careful just how he handled it. But he could take care of it, he knew. After today, nothing would be very tough.

By
H. C. Malcolm



*As he started, Harry
came after Joe. . . .*

*Not even his best friend
would have picked gentle
Joey as a member of that unholy
combo, where—*

THREE IS A SHROUD

JOE SAID, "This is Mitch."
Harry said, standing up and shaking hands. "Hiya, Mitch."

Joe said, "Mitch is staying with us a while. Him and me was buddies in the South Pacific."

"Swell," Harry said. "Sit down and have a brew, Mitch. Shove over some, Joe."

Joe shoved over in the booth so Mitch could sit down. Harry picked up the

empties and carted them over to the bar, clinking the sides together to attract the bar-keep's attention. Joe said, "Harry and me work together, Mitch. He's a good joe. You'll like Harry."

"Yeah."

"What'd you do today?"

"Nothing much."

"How's Ellen?"

Mitch said he guessed Ellen was okay. He had his head turned sideways, like

he was watching Harry. Joe couldn't see his face. Joe said, "She sure likes you, Mitch."

"Yeah?"

"On the level. She was telling me just this morning. She really likes you."

"That's fine," Mitch said. He lighted a cigarette. "That's swell."

"On the level. Really."

Harry came back, bringing three bottles. He set them on the table and slid in on the other side of the booth, drying his hands on the front of his coat. "I got some cold ones, this time." He lifted one bottle and grinned from behind it. "Here's suds in your eye."

"Cheers," Joe said.

Mitch nodded and drank.

"Don't let me forget," Harry said. "I got your gun in my car, Joe."

"You get any ducks?"

"Couple."

"Harry bought part of a lake down on the island," Joe said. "He's gonna keep everybody in the office in ducks."

Harry tried to laugh, but the beer in his mouth choked him. He had to pat himself on the chest to stop coughing. "Boy," he said, "you kill me!"

Joe grinned a big grin. "I can arrange that, too."

"You're a real card, aren't you? He's a card, huh, Mitch?"

"Yeah," Mitch said. He stumped his cigarette into the ashtray. "You coming home pretty quick, Joe?"

Joe said he didn't think so. He said he kind of figured on staying down and hoisting a few.

"Boy," Harry said, "if I had your wife you wouldn't catch me staying down. I'd be taking the first bus home. The very first bus."

"A guy's gotta have some time to himself," Joe said.

"You sure must need a lot of it," Harry said. "Every night the same thing. Just about every night. And with something

like that waiting at home for you. You must be nuts." He looked across at Mitch. "Am I right, or am I? Isn't Ellen a real looker?"

Mitch had the bottle up, finishing the last of his beer. He moved his shoulders.

"After you're married a while you think about it different," Joe said.

"There's only one way we'd think about it," Harry said, still looking at Mitch. "Am I right, or am I?"

"I got to be shoving," Mitch said. He stood up.

"You tell Ellen I won't be home for dinner."

"Yeah."

After he was gone Joe and Harry had a couple more bottles of beer. Harry said Mitch seemed like a nice guy but kind of quiet.

"He just got out," Joe said. "He signed up for a couple extra hitches. He's been over with MacArthur."

"Don't let me forget your gun."

"Uh-huh."

"He's a good-looking bird, isn't he?"

"Mitch? Yeah. Ellen sure likes him."

"I bet she does."

Joe's head jerked up. "What you mean by that crack?"

"Oh—nothing."

"Come on, what you mean?"

"Skip it, Joe. Just forget I said it."

"The hell I'll forget. The hell. What you mean?"

HARRY was making wet circles on the table top with the bottom of his beer bottle. He said slowly, "It's just I was thinking."

"Thinking what?"

"It's just I was thinking if I was married to a queen like Ellen I wouldn't want some big, good looking guy hanging around when I wasn't there."

Joe's face reddened angrily. "That's a crummy thing to say."

"I said to skip it, didn't I?"

"A hell of a crummy thing. What kind a girl you think Ellen is, anyway?"

"Just forget it, will you?"

"And Mitch is my huddy. Him and me was in the South Pacific together."

"Sure. Sure he is. Sure. I'm sorry."

"You should be."

"I said I was, didn't I?"

"Okay." Joe finished his beer. He pushed out of the booth and collected the bottles. "I'll get a couple."

"No more for me," Harry said. "I got to be going. I got a date."

"You can stick around for another one," Joe said. "After the way you been talking I guess you can stick around for another one."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "If you say so."

"I say so."

"Just so you don't let me forget about that gun."

After Joe came back with more beer they were quiet for a while and then Harry asked what Mitch was doing.

"Nothing," Joe said. "He's been looking around. Kind of. Hasn't found anything yet. When a guy first gets out he's in no hurry. You know how it is."

"Yeah."

"He kind of wants to take it easy."

"Yeah."

"He's a good guy, old Mitch is."

"How long's he been staying with you?"

"'Bout six weeks."

"Pretty long time, huh?"

"Yeah." Joe was shredding the label from his beer bottle.

"He got a girl?"

"Not him." Joe looked up and grinned. "Not just any one in particular, if that's what you mean. Not old Mitch. He goes for all of them. I remember down in Australia—" He broke off, frowning. He wadded the damp label of his bottle and dropped it into the ashtray.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked.

"Nothing. Not a damn thing."

"You don't have to get so huffy. I was just asking."

"I'll get a couple," Joe said.

Harry went to buy cigarettes and when he came back Joe was back in the booth, smoking a cigarette and looking sullen. Harry asked what was eating him and Joe said there wasn't anything and Harry could damn well keep his nose out of other people's business. He finished his bottle of beer before Harry was even half through, and went to the bar for another. His face was flushed and his lips moved jerkily like he was talking to himself.

"I better go pretty quick," Harry said.

"Stick around a while."

"Don't let me forget that gun. I sure appreciate you letting me use it. I was going to clean it for you but I didn't have time. There's some cleaning waste in the car if you want to use it."



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"There's some at home," Joe said.

"What's the matter, anyway? You look like you lost your last friend."

"Skip it."

"You never did tell me about Mitch in Australia."

"Drink your beer," Joe said. "I'll get a couple."

Harry said he couldn't because he had this date and Joe said just one more round and they'd both go. They drank without talking because Joe didn't seem to want to, and then they left the place and went around to the parking lot where they both kept their cars. Joe had started up and was driving out when he heard Harry yelling at him. He jammed on the brakes. Harry came running up, out of breath, and carrying the shotgun. "You damn near forgot this after all."

"Yeah," Joe said.

Harry opened the rear door of the car. "I'll put it in here in the back seat."

"Yeah," Joe said. "Do that."

Be careful of it. I've got the safety on but it's still loaded."

"I'll do that," Joe said.

"Give my regards to Ellen, and say hello to Mitch."

"I'll do that, too."

Harry slammed the rear door. "Take it easy, Joe. You're full of beer."

"I'm full of something," Joe said. He let in the clutch with a jerk and roared off.

"THE WAY we get it, the police lieutenant said, "this guy was drunk."

"Or crazy," said the district attorney.

"Drunk is more like it," the lieutenant said. "He was that kind of guy. A lush.

Got himself polluted about every night. Usually he rolled in around two in the morning. Only this time he came home early. I guess we'll never know why."

The district attorney said, making pencil marks along the edge of his desk blotter, that it probably wasn't important.

"Yeah."

"What else?"

"Well." The police lieutenant settled himself deeper in his chair. "This other guy, this Mitch, was living in the house. Or staying there. Seems he was an old army buddy of the lush. He was already home, see. He'd just taken a shower and was coming down the hall to his bedroom. And then Joe ups with the shotgun and calls him. He's drunk and he shouts. Mitch can't tell what he's saying. He tries to calm this Joe down and he doesn't get anywhere. He just makes Joe madder. And then Joe ups with the shotgun and Mitch starts running. He hears the gun go off. When he looks back there's Joe on the floor with most of his face gone."

"That's the part I don't figure."

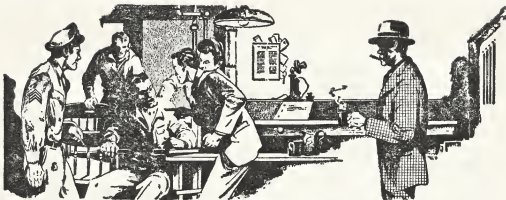
"The breech split," said the lieutenant. "The barrel was packed full of waste. Like somebody had started to clean it and forgot to finish. The charge blew right back at him."

The district attorney said, yawning, that you never could tell what a fool drunk would do. He got up, stretched, reached for his hat. "What about the wife?"

"We finally located her," the police lieutenant said. "Located her in a night club out on the strip. Getting loaded to the gills. Along with some character named Harry."

WELSH law of three centuries ago provided a special penalty for one form of assault and battery. Any woman who pulled the hair of another woman was fined a penny for every hair pulled out by the root!

—Frank Cowles



THE THIRD DEGREE

By Hallack McCord

(Answers on page 103)

TOP-GRADE scientific sleuthing requires a knowledge and skill which very few possess. When it comes to knowing the techniques of crime investigation, how do you rate? Below are twenty questions about crooks and detective work. If you can answer eighteen or more of them correctly, you rank as excellent. Answer sixteen or seventeen and you're good. But call the turn on fourteen or fewer, and you're only fair. Good luck!

1. If one convict asked another for some "briars," what would he be seeking?

2. In the language of penitentiary inmates, what is the meaning of the expression, "cake and wine?"

3. True or false? The underworld slang term, "dead," means "reformed."

4. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he had just stolen a "fawney," which one of the following items would you think he had lifted? A fur coat? A large automobile? A ring?

5. True or false? In the language of the underworld, a "high tober" is an expert thief.

6. What is meant when a prison is said to be under "iron rule?"

7. Would weed killer used as a poison be likely to contain arsenic as a killing agent?

8. If someone had been poisoned with aconite but was not dead, would you think it wise to use artificial respiration on him?

9. How long does it take to prepare and smoke an opium "pill?"

10. If a crook acquaintance of yours said he had just been released from the "little school," from which of the following places would you think he had been sprung? A house of correction? A large penitentiary? A small town jail?

11. In the language of the underworld, what is a "pad?"

12. If a crook acquaintance of yours said he had just "popped" a ring, which of the following things would you think he had done? Pawned a ring? Stolen a ring? Taken a ring as a bribe?

13. What is the underworld slang meaning of the term to "root?"

14. If the chief of detectives sent you out for a "skiboo," which of the following would you return with? A man skilled in gunfighting? A safe robber? A stool pigeon?

15. In crook slang, what are "snips?"

16. If a confidence man acquaintance told you he had a "spruce" on the hook, what would you think he was talking about?

17. True or false? "Squeeze rates" are exorbitant rates charged for "protection."

18. True or false? Footprints made by a running person generally tend to be more readily visible and identifiable than footprints made by a walking person.

19. True or false? The width of tire marks will always disclose the dimensions of the tire.

20. Hairs taken from a living person for comparison with those found at the scene of a crime should generally be shaved from the head of that person. Yes or no?

*He came toward her quietly
from the window. The bones
of her body felt like water...*



*He to kill . . . and she to die . . . they met
in one last rendezvous—at that unguess-
able hour that lies between half-past terror
and the—*

NIGHT BEFORE MURDER

A novel by Joel Townsley Rogers



CHAPTER ONE

Murder Kick

THE headlines of the littered newspapers at the subway corner said: BRIDE SLAIN IN BRONX APARTMENT. City Edition, Late Morning, Noon, 2:15 Stock Market Latest Prices. Trash cans. Gutters. Torn and scuffed on the pavement. Down the subway stairs. The avenue and cross-thoroughfare were filled with horn-squawkings, brake squeals, traf-

fic policeman's whistle blasts, the sidewalks with the stride and shuffle of a million feet.

MANIAC KILLER SOUGHT IN BRONX SLAYING, said the stacks of five-star editions on the corner newsstand.

A drizzle was falling in the late October day. With her face bowed beneath her yellow raincoat hood, Dora Gilrymple turned from the side street on to the avenue, heading for the lighted windows of the supermarket in the middle of the short block.

At the store entrance she hesitated, glancing up towards the thronging corner. She fumbled in her pocketbook for a nickel as she proceeded a little furtively and hurriedly on towards the newsstand there.

A raincoated horde was slogging up the subway steps from a train just in. At the north-south street curb, a throng stood waiting for the traffic, while another throng poured over the east-west crossing with the light. Inside the sidewalk news-booth the headless vendor moved his thin spider arms, collecting and passing coins or papers—a gray-sweated torso truncated at the pelvis by his counter, decapitated by the row of magazines and comics hanging by snaps from a cord along the upper front of the boxlike newsstand.

She still felt blurred, a little night-mared, among all the anonymous millions. She laid her coin down on a stack of Globe-Mails and snatched one up half guiltily, turning quickly away. She hurried back with it to the bright supermarket, which she entered with a surge of unreasonable escape.

Beyond the turnstile inside she took a grocery cart, putting her paper in the basket. She picked up a ticket at the meat counter, and wheeled on to the dairy and vegetable sections while waiting for her number to be called.

In the warm, bright store, with its familiar atmosphere, peopled with housewives like herself engaged in a familiar and commonplace activity, she felt more at ease, more at home. More at home, actually, than in their small basement studio-apartment when Tim was away. Almost more even than at times when he was there, sitting over his chessboard uncommunicatively pondering a problem, lying on the couch listening to a low-pitched medley of radio police calls, or lounging in the club chair with his cigar, looking over some of his latest acquisitions of

match covers or playing cards for his collections, wrapped in his own thoughts, since it was still a cramped and cavelike sort of living place to her, hardly like a home at all, remembering the spacious old white houses on the green at Sharon.

But they had a supermarket even in Sharon. The same layout and appearance, the same canned brands. Much the same sort of customers, wearing their old coats, scanning prices, picking out fruits.

If not the first-name greetings and small intimate conversations and the faces known all her life, still not all completely blurred and strange. She turned back her hood from her tendrils of moisture-curved fair hair, her cheeks pink through delicate skin, with that feeling of warmth and accustomedness, of a half-dreamed homecoming, in her. As if Grandfather Turner were still alive, as if she had never learned that long ago everything had been mortgaged, sold and lost. As if she had never fled away from that pauper's shame and the sympathetic eyes, nor got her job at the Gilmore in Ocean Beach, nor met Tim, with his abrupt possessive love, and come to live with him in the core and center of the great faceless city . . . three confused and overwhelming months, still like a dream.

A quart of milk, a dozen eggs. Coffee, sugar, bread. Celery, a package of frozen limas—Tim liked them better than other vegetables, or at least ate them without comment, and he should be home for dinner tonight, after last night on duty, although she never knew. She would get a steak in case, anyway—two pounds of round, cut thick.

MANIAC KILLER SOUGHT. WHOLE HOMICIDE SQUAD PUT ON TWENTY-FOUR HOUR DUTY. MURDER IN WEST BRONX LINKED WITH BROOKLYN SLAYING LAST MONTH, UNSOLVED JERSEY, STATEN ISLAND KILLINGS.

She had picked up and replaced her paper in the basket between the items as

she put them in, to keep it fresh when she got home. The headlines stood up at her between the coffee can and the bread.

They meant that Tim would be late again tonight, quite probably. Coming in silently long after she was in bed. Moving around in the darkness in his quiet, imponderable way, taking every care not to disturb her.

He didn't want her to wake up when he came in so late that way, she knew, and so she never did. But long after he was finally asleep she would still be lying motionless, head turned upon her pillow with lash-shadowed eyes, herself still watching, listening. Through the locked, barred window, through the crack of the drawn shade.

The pink refulgence of the night above the roofs, the throbbing endless cry. Like the suffused shadow of a red lightning which had struck out of the blackness suddenly far off. Like a keening jungle cry.

Tonight again.

He didn't like to have her read the newspapers. If he read them at all himself, he never brought them home. He never mentioned anything about his work to her. If he had had his way, she thought, if his friend and brother-officer Detective Sergeant Higgins hadn't been the other man on the double date the night she met him, with Miss Minnix, the red-haired private-duty nurse, at Ocean Beach the end of August, she might never have known that he was a police detective, nor at first perhaps even his right name.

He hadn't married her to make her the cute, brainless lady half of a domestic sleuthing team, like one of these screw-ball whodunits by delirious old-maid authors, as he had told her with one of his rare quiet smiles. Lighting his cigar in relaxed contentment, watching her blow out the candles and gather up the dessert plates from their first dinner in the little basement apartment, amused

momentarily at some quality of earnestness and anxiety in her, of small-town-bride's sense of obligation to be a good wife, a helpmeet, in the old-fashioned world of Grandfather Turner, from which she could not escape—The first dinner she had every got for him, only the third or fourth at all that they had had together. This small, sunless place which he had found for them to live in—quite pleased himself that he had found it, a place with its own kitchenette and bath, maple furniture pretty new, a fireplace and a backyard to look out on, plenty of storage space, a separate front entrance, convenient yet secluded, quite desirable it seemed, by city standards.

It wasn't quite like that, he had told her. Not always so cute and playful. There were men who would like to get him in any way they could—stupid men, but vicious and malignant. He could take care of himself all right, but he didn't want to have to worry about her, nor think of her as worrying. So just go to the movies, see the museums, do your shopping and your sewing, dish up a feed for me when I can get home, and pretend you're married to a plumber. A woman of his own, a place where he can take his necktie off and forget his troubles, is what a man needs, and all he wants. . . .

IT WAS then that he had told her about Alyn, quite unemotionally. His first wife, the girl he had married back during the war. About the thing that had happened to her, that it didn't do any good to think about. Coming home to her one night in San Francisco—the glimpse of a shadowy, spiderlike figure vanishing down the back alley—finding the door-lock broken, the living room a shambles—and her lying in the bedroom—he had come back five minutes too late.

It might not have been an enemy, of course. Probably hadn't been. Perhaps some man she had got in casual conver-

sation with in a cafeteria or at a drugstore soda fountain—she had been a friendly, trusting girl, small-town herself, not city-wise. Perhaps it had been just a prowling fiend, the blind lightning strike. There had been other women killed about that time. War brought those things out. Battle-batty soldiers and sailors from the Pacific. They had had the mental hospital there.

Yet try to think of everything that might happen, listen for whispers, read the newspapers striving for sensation, all headlines, horror, crime, and you'd go haywire. It's not one in a million that the lightning strikes. Don't make friends with strangers, and don't worry about anything, that's all. . . .

There had been something on the nine o'clock news-broadcast this morning, though—which she always listened to after Tim was gone, lingering over a third cup of coffee, with too little to occupy the day ahead—about the Bronx murder, and again at noon. Just a couple of sentences, which was all they ever had about anything on the air. A bride strangled in her apartment by an unknown intruder, her body found by her husband. But something a little irrational suggested, something undeclared.

MANIAC KILLER—

She picked the paper up from the basket while she waited at the meat counter. She would crumple it under the fireplace kindling when she had finished reading it at home, the pieces of old boxes she had collected from the cluttered backyard, and have a fire this evening.

The murder in her apartment at 122 Hudsonview Terrace, the Bronx, of Mrs. Fanya Durik, 22, two-months' bride—

She was twenty-two herself. She wasn't yet even a two-months' bride. A former night-club dancer, Budapest-born, the paper said, her husband a well known gambler known as Curly Durik, their

four room riverfront apartment done expensively in blond woods and pink mirrors and leopard-skin walls—and although they might have had no single interest or thought in common while she had been alive, still the similarity of age and brevity of wifehood made an intangible bond between her and Dora, now that she was dead, it almost seemed.

As if, but for the chance of having met and married Tim instead of a gambler named Curly Durik, of living in a rear basement of a converted old brownstone house on a dingy midtown side street instead of a chrome-and-glassbrick modern uptown structure, of having heavy, old-fashioned but unbreakable bolts and chain on her door instead of a flimsy, ornate decorator's lock, and of having nothing to be murdered for—though Tim did have some of his family's silver and things packed away in boxes in the trunk room in the front part of the basement, and his match cover and playing card collections, should anyone want to commit murder for things like that—as if, but for all those chances, or some of them, it might have been a girl named Dora about whom a girl named Fanya would have been reading.

The details appeared simple. The husband, Curly Durik, had returned home at two o'clock this morning from a political-club benefit dance which he had expected to take her to, but which a last-minute headache had kept her from attending. He had found the apartment door forced, and her in their lighted bedroom dead, amidst a scene of disorder, strangled with one of her stockings.

Since her jewel box had been emptied, and a thousand dollars in cash was missing from the dresser top, where Curly Durik had left it, as well as a variety of objects not yet completely itemized, it had apparently been the work of a burglar, who had discovered her when he flashed on the bedroom lights. To silence her, to pre-

vent her from identifying his rogue's gallery picture afterwards, he had snatched up the sheer fabric, convenient on a chair, and ended her.

If she had not been there, been killed, it might have been merely another of the hundreds of residential burglaries which occur annually. Except that some of the items missing had been curios of comparatively small money value and too easily identified—a carved Eskimo walrus tusk, a set of Chinese ivory chessmen, a small, hideous Melanesian devil-god which Curly Durik had got in the Solomons with the Marines and regarded as his luck.

... and even more trivial things, it is believed, such as might have been taken only by a child or someone insane.

"The possibility that a homicidal maniac was responsible, with burglary merely an incident, has been admitted by the police. It is believed he may be the same killer who clubbed to death Mrs. Julia Ordway, wealthy stock-broker's widow, in her Brooklyn home September 25th, for whom rewards of twenty thousand dollars have been offered. A link is also seen with the murder of the Kirschmann sisters, aged recluses, in their ancestral mansion in Hoboken, New Jersey, last July, as well as with the still-unsolved killing of Mrs. Honey Markling, beauty shop owner, and her fifteen-year-old daughter in their New Brighton, Staten Island, bungalow on Valentine's day, 1948, by some maniac—a crime which was not discovered till twelve hours later, when guests arrived for the party that afternoon.

"Personally I have no doubt that all those murders, and quite possibly others elsewhere over a period of time, were the work

of some madman, perhaps one who has been in and out of asylums in the intervals, or who has some other record by which he may be traced," stated Detective-Sergeant George Higgins, Homicide veteran assigned to the case with other ace headquarters detectives.

Other ace headquarters detectives—that meant Tim.

Tim had told her not to read the newspapers. But you couldn't stop all women. So long as there were newspapers, so long as there were such things happening. That Ordway murder only three weeks ago—it had been so terrible.

She didn't feel alarmed for herself, of course. She was just one of millions. The women in the paper, the murdered women, from this girl named Fanya last night to the aged recluse sisters last year in their ancestral mansion in Hoboken—she remembered that, it had been on the radio even in Sharon, and rebashed in the Sunday newspapers and the weekly news-magazine that Grandfather Turner took. How dreary and decayed it had all sounded—a huge, peeling old Victorian house with falling porch and boarded windows, in a neighborhood long gone to slum, filled with old trunks and moldy piles of old finery and huge labyrinthine stacks of old newspapers, with rats running; and the two old women, two old, old sisters, recluses, reputed to have been misers with sheaves of bonds and tens of thousands of dollars hidden, sitting

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in their dingy kitchen after their scrap of supper, playing a shaky game of double-solitaire with antique cards, hiding from life in their moldering tomb, hiding from death; but there death finding them—they, and Mrs. Ordway and the others mentioned, the beauty-shop owner and her child two years ago.

The uneasiness women feel, they cannot help but feel. But no reason to imagine that on her the red lightning might strike, out of the blind blackness of the night.

DETETECTIVE Sergeant George Higgins—that was her Mr. Higgins, she thought, Tim's friend, Miss Minnix's date at Ocean Beach the night she had met Tim.

It was momentarily almost like home, the *Weekly Argus*, to see the name of someone she knew in the paper, even if only one name. He came back to her from that evening, with brick-haired Bessie Minnix. A slight, almost frail-looking man with a blue, reflective gaze, crow's feet around his eyes, dark hair touched with grey. It had been a little surprising to learn that he was a police officer—even more than that his friend Mr. Gilrymple also was, whom she had ticketed previously as a businessman.

They went to the Jungle Club on the boardwalk where they started out their double date, Mr. Higgins erecting a tower of highball and wine-glasses carefully and topping the edifice with a penthouse of swizzle-sticks laid crosswise, while Tim washed down his steak with beer and she picked at the last bit of her lobster thermidor and tasted her sauterne, and Bessie Minnix—brick-haired and shiny-eyed, volubly gay with her second highball and with having a date with men—had carried the ball of conversation with an account of her patient, Mrs. Wintringham, the wealthy, partially paralyzed old lady with the bad heart, who had died in their suite

in the President Hotel only last night. . . .

Tim and Mr. Higgins had been after something from Bessie Minnix, Dora had realized later. Something about something in their police line. The date hadn't been for them at the beginning just a casual evening with two girls.

Whatever it had been, though, they must have decided it was nothing; and it had come to nothing. Balancing the last of his glass sticks on the tower top, Mr. Higgins had lifted his gaze to Tim, who was looking at him with match held to his cigar, and the two of them had exchanged a brief headshake.

"Charlie's aunt," Mr. Higgins had said cryptically, plaintively, as Bessie Minnix paused to down her drink.

"No tie, George," Tim had replied casually. "Just one of those things."

"Wrong bet, it looks like," Mr. Higgins had said. "Couldn't have been Charlie this time, anyway."

"Not very well," Tim had said, putting his empty match cover away in his breast pocket, after a glance at it. "Old Charlie. I wonder if he's finished his chess game yet."

Their words, like a brief pattering of casual rain.

"Charlie's Aunt!" Bessie Minnix had exclaimed brightly, painting her lips like a barn door. "Did you boys see it, too? They had a revival of it at the summer theater here in June. I never saw anything so funny."

"I guess that's right," Mr. Higgins had said, and had sat erect, unpling his glass tower briskly. "Well, what are we sitting here for? Bessie, dance?" And then Tim had asked her. . . .

After that she had asked Tim what Mr. Higgins—George—and he had wanted to learn from goodnatured Bessie Minnix. Not knowing yet that for nothing there was never any answer. And Tim had told her, just like that, "Nothing." In that secret patient business of following

murderers there must be many faint false trails that come to nothing, delicate towers to build up carefully and then take down, days and nights of watching, listening, wasted and thrown away.

She would have liked to have got to know Mr. Higgins better. He had been attracted to her, she had known intuitively, and perhaps had regretted the pairing, particularly after finding that Bessie Minnix had nothing to give—poor Bessie had been a very sweet, plump girl, but not very good looking, and trying to make up for it by acting hilarious and loud; and probably not very attractive to men. But Tim had grabbed her for himself almost at once, monopolizing her from the first dance on, and taking her on afterwards to another more intimate dance-and-supper spot.

Abrupt, possessive, overwhelming. That evening, confused and whirling night. All half a blurred dream still. A married woman, a young housewife. In the great lost city.

She hadn't seen Mr. Higgins since, and Tim had only casually mentioned him—she had got the idea that he hadn't liked the idea of Tim's marrying her. But she could still see him building his frail towers, with his precise and delicate hands, reflective-eyed.

Just one of millions. A girl unknown, unmarked, obscure, and without possessions. The fear all women feel, they cannot help but feel. But not at her the red lightning striking suddenly out of the blind blackness of the night, with nothing to attract it. Not towards her, for no reason, the unboxed rattlesnake crawling, with red venomous eyes on her alone, her alone marked for his prey. . . .

She had started to open up her newspaper, fumbling. She felt eyes on her.

"Eighty-one. EIGHTY-ONE!"

She looked up—summoned, startled. A rosy-faced clerk behind the display case was grinning at her. She folded her paper

in quick confusion, thrusting it beneath her arm. She had her plastic ticket in her right hand—she had been holding it with its number exposed on the paper's back page. She didn't know how many times, seeing it, he had been calling it out. She laid it on the counter.

"Two pounds of round steak, please, about an inch and a half thick," she said as he took the ticket.

He turned to the meat-block behind. Picked up his knife. A smooth, red, sweeping slice. He put the meat on a piece of paper. Turned, and laid it on the scales.

"Two pounds five ounces okay?" he asked, eyeing the figure with palms spread—look, no hands.

"All right," she said.

"A dollar ninety-five," he said. "What else, lady?"

"Nothing else today, I believe, thanks."

THE checker at the exit counter ticked off her purchases on his register, rang up the total. Four dollars seventy-three cents. He smoothed out the bill she gave him and placed it in his cash drawer. Planted down a quarter and two pennies, and stowed her items into a big paper sack.

"Manage it all right?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she smiled at him. "Only a couple of blocks to carry it. Thanks."

"Well," he said, "come again."

A man with a bald head, square face. She didn't remember him before. But perhaps he recognized her from previous times. Less blurred to others than they to her.

She took the sack in both arms. Turned towards the door. Beyond it the thronging sidewalk, truck-filled street, lights and shadows, the drizzling rain, the chill of the early autumnal dark. But she still felt warmed a little by the brightness and the illusion of familiarity, before going out.

She hadn't picked up her newspaper. It lay on the counter where she had placed it. She set her sack down on the counter again while she arranged her hands to grasp it.

It lay folded with its lower left quarter facing up. Down towards the bottom there was a three inch single-column section in bold face, **Latest Bulletins**, which she hadn't seen before.

Half a dozen one-sentence dispatches, unelaborated and unevaluated, which had been received after the paper had been made up, inserted in the space left open for them, to give the appearance of last-minute immediacy.

Moscow: Premier Stalin today made an appointment.

Baltimore: Pretty Lady broke her neck in the fourth today before a crowd of . . .

Beacon, N. Y.: Charles Wintringham, wife murderer, is at large from the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, where records show him supposedly incarcerated. . . .

Charles Wintringham. . . .

Wintringham . . . Charlie. . . .

It was the blurred nightmare still. The sense of something nameless and unanswered. She was back in the Jungle Club at Ocean Beach, while Bessie Minnix talked with both hands and highball glass about her half-paralyzed old patient who had suffocated in her bed the previous night.

"I had left her falling off to sleep, after I had made her comfortable for the night, and she had told me she didn't need anything more, going out for my regular two hours. But she must have waked up and rolled herself over somehow. Maybe she had been reaching for the pack of cards on her bedside table to tell her fortune or play solitaire—they were scattered on the floor beside her bed. But she had got her face down in the pillow and had suffocated. I feel just too terrible about it, though the doctor says it wasn't my fault at all, just one of those things. Poor old

Mrs. Wintringham, she was really such a sweet old lady. No relatives in all the world except a nephew-in-law in the asylum now, who's always been crazy."

And Mr. Higgins saying, "Charlie."

And Tim, "Charlie."

"Charlie's aunt. Couldn't have been him this time very well, though . . . wonder if he ever finished his chess game?"

Like the brief patter of casual drops of rain. Mr. Higgins regretfully, Tim with his rare flashing smile, amused at some memory for the moment.

Old Mrs. Wintringham. Scattered cards . . . oh, there was never any answer to anything! But she was back there at the Jungle Club, and they were talking about murder.

No, she wasn't. She was here alone in the great thronging city, with her arms full of a sack of groceries, two blocks away—a short half block down the avenue, and then a long block and a half along the dark narrow side street to the right—from the little dingy basement that she called home. Tim would be late again tonight, but he would be home sometime, and would expect to find her there when he came in.

She left the paper on the counter, and went towards the door. It was pushed open by someone entering. She caught it with her hip, and went out into the darkening, wet street.

MANIAC KILLER LOOSE, AMOK, said the headlines of the Seven-star Complete Sports Final slapped on the newsstand at the subway corner by the hurrying deliveryman from the Globe-Mail truck.

"A hunnerd, pop," the deliveryman sang out over his shoulder to the headless vendor inside the booth, and jumped back into his truck.

Lights changed. The traffic-policeman in the middle of the intersection blew his whistle. Brakes screamed. Horns squawked. Cabs and trucks stopped, started up.

CHAPTER TWO

And Walk the Night

THE inconspicuous man who had emerged from the subway exit—there were fifty or a hundred others who had slogged up the stairs with him, and none of them was particularly conspicuous, shabby, raincoated, with bent city faces, but he the least conspicuous of all—paused momentarily at the newsstand in passing. He thrust his hand into his pants pocket beneath the skirts of his soiled tan raincoat and put it down on the new stack of Globe-Mails, where a few nickels and dimes lay scattered, not yet gathered in by the gray-sweated torso inside the booth. He picked up a nickel and a paper, and passed on.

He was about five feet seven in height, if anyone had looked at him, with meager, sloping shoulders. He had an oval face, skin pale and a little oily, nose with a slight thickness of the flanges, full lips beneath a brown, silky mustache like a wisp of spaniel's ear, and sad brown spaniel eyes. He wore, in addition to his raincoat, a brown snapbrim hat dark with rain, brown tweed pants, and soggy brown brogues.

At the east-west curb he paused with the red light and unfolded his newspaper.

MANIAC KILLER LOOSE, AMOK

Insane Wife-Slayer Found Not Incarcerated After Check. Probe Demanded of Official Laxity. Bribery Suspected, Resulting in Homicidal Paranoid at Large.

Pursuing a tip received today from a confidential informant after the murder of Mrs. Fanya Durik in her apartment in the West Bronx last night, a check by *Globe-Mail* reporters has disclosed that Charles Wintringham, 34, who was adjudged insane last May and committed to the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, is not at that institution as recorded, and his whereabouts are unknown.

Wintringham, eccentric scion of a

wealthy Boston family, one-time Harvard student, wartime naval ensign found psychotic after combat experiences and discharged in 1944, was committed on June 15 as a paranoid, after having been discovered in his suite in a fashionable east side residential hotel, upon investigation following the complaint of another resident who had heard screams, with the body of his wife, Mrs. Brenda Wintringham, 40, a former nurse, lying savagely beaten to death in their adjacent bedroom. Wintringham, absorbed in a chess game, was with difficulty interrupted to admit—

The inconspicuous man's sad brown spaniel eyes had slid down the page indifferently. They dropped to the table of contents in the lower right-hand corner, which he had been seeking. *Chess*, he saw, p. 18.

He opened the paper up, folded it over. *Your Daily Chess Problem*, by *Champion*. He stepped down from the curb and started across the avenue as the light changed and the traffic policeman's whistle blew. With eyes on the page he walked slowly across between the cabs.

"Are you crazy, Mac?" a truckdriver with New Jersey license plates yelled at him, braking swervingly to a stop on the wet pavement within inches, as he approached the opposite curb.

Mounting the curb, the inconspicuous man turned, and paused at the north-south curb, while the stream of pedestrians going across pushed around and past him. He started over when the light changed and the whistle blew, between the rush of the crosstown traffic. On the far side he paused again, heeled around three-quarters, and started back diagonally across the intersection, with eyes still on his paper.

The big policeman lifted his whistle to his lips and blew a blast as the jay-walker sunk in his newspaper reached him. He held up his hand imperiously. "Stop, you!" He faced away. The inoffensive man went on behind the broad black rubber-coated back. He went on to the catercorner curb, and stepped up on

it from the newspaper-littered gutter.

He was back at the corner where he had come up from the subway. He turned his paper back to the front page, and folded it.

He had made two rook's moves and a bishop's move, or a pawn's move and a knight's move, or three king's moves—however it might be looked at. He had finished his game, anyway, and was ready to begin. He dropped the paper in passing at the base of the newsstand he had got it from . . . it was scuffed underfoot, a rag on the littered walk.

With face bent beneath his hatbrim, hands jammed in raincoat pockets, shoulders hunched, he went shuffling in his soggy shoes down the thronging sidewalk, past the wide, bright windows of the supermarket in the middle of the short block. At the next corner he turned towards the curb at his left and crossed over the avenue again. He went eastward for a long block, past brownstone houses with high stoops, lace-curtained windows, *Furnished Room* signs.

At the next avenue over, he paused again, searching around him with quiet, veiled eyes. He started to turn right. He continued on across the avenue instead, and turned left up the other side. He went north up the thronging way.

He paused again at a corner two blocks further on and heeled slowly, looking all around. The flanges of his nostrils were spread motionless. He started to the right around the corner—stopped, came back. He retraced his way a short block south. At the corner there he went across the avenue again. He proceeded west along the long, quiet block.

Three-quarters of the way along it, approaching the subway avenue again, he paused, turning quietly, sad spaniel gaze beneath his hat, hands in raincoat pockets.

The block, mostly wholesale places and warehouses, with few residences, few dingy-windowed shops, was sparsely

trafficked, infrequently pedestrianed, in this after-workday hour.

Within the hundred feet or more behind him there were only two figures, in fact—a shabby, jerking man without an outer coat, hands huddled in pants pockets, lapels turned up about his throat, who was shuffling along about fifty feet behind him and another, thirty feet or so farther behind, a short, fat man in a navy raincoat, transparent raincover on his hat, who had paused in front of a lunchroom window to look at the display.

He walked back quietly towards the jerking man. He paused and faced him meekly, hands in pockets, as the jerking man, twitching, stopped and fell back against the building wall.

"Cop?" he asked softly, almost apologetically.

The frayed man against the building wall twitched. He jerked.

"Whassay?"

"I thought you might be a detective," said the inoffensive man with mild regret. "Shadowing me."

"Listen," the frayed man twitched. "Know where a guy can get a reef? A muggles? I'm not a bum. I got the dough."

He fingered a half-dollar, displaying it in a dirty-nailed claw, twitching against the wall.

The inoffensive man walked on back to where the short fat man in the navy raincoat and plastic-covered hat stood looking in the window of the closed lunchroom.

"Dick?" he asked, as the window-gazer slowly heeled to him.

The short, fat man looked at him with a toothpick in his mouth, shiny-shaven cheeks bulging like the cheekpouches of a squirrel.

"Yeah," he said. "Sure. Detective-Sergeant O'Mulligan of the safe and loft squad. How did you spot me, brother? I generally never give myself away."

"You've been quite clever," said the

inoffensive man gently. "Let me compliment you. I haven't actually caught sight of you once, till now. How long have you been tailing me?"

"How long?" said the short, fat man reflectively. "You mean just today? Oh, couple of hours, I'd say, since about four o'clock. Tailing you like the seat of your pants. Don't worry if you don't see me—I ain't far away."

"I'll count on it," the inoffensive one said.

HE TURNED quietly back. He went past the twitching man against the wall, and on to the end of the block. He turned left at the corner, down the avenue.

The short, fat man gave a grunting laugh. He strolled on to the twitching man.

"What that bird say to you?" he asked. "Ask if you was a dick?"

"Yeah," said the twitching man. "If I was tailing him."

"That guy's a nut," said the short, fat man a little savagely, picking at his teeth.

"Know where a guy can get a Mary Warner?" asked the twitching man. "I gave a kid four bits to get me one after school today. He claimed he knew a guy. But he never showed up with it, the dirty little bum. Look, I got me another half buck. I'm not trying to mooch."

The short, fat man looked over his shoulder, chewing his toothpick. He reached out and took the shaking half dollar and pocketed it. He took off his hat and replaced it. Held out his hand, palm down.

"Just happened to have one extra," he said. "Guess I can oblige."

"Narcotics squad," said the frayed, unshaven man, briskly straightened, showing a badge, without a twitch. "Okay, Fat Clarence. Peddling them to school kids. I've been prowling for you a long time."

"Jeez!" said the fat man, spitting out his toothpick. "That's what a guy gets for doing a favor to a bum. Don't tell me your name is Shaky Smith! When I had your prescription right down to the last twitch. It was that screwball nut that threw me off, asking if you was a dick—screwball! He was crazy as a fox."

"Yeah," the plainclothesman said indifferently. "All right, Fat Clarence, let's get along. I want to get me a bath tonight. . . ."

Around the corner, with no one following him, the spaniel man went on his way down the busy avenue. A short block ahead of him there was the cross-thoroughfare, the subway intersection, once again. He felt warmer, coming back to it.

He jaywalked across the jammed intersection again, between the rushing fenders, past the huge traffic policeman blowing his whistle, towards the farther corner, the subway corner that he had started from.

There was a fantastic picture in his mind—a dream image, however nebulous and drifting—of what he was seeking. It had the shape of a woman, an ordinary housewife—dark or blonde, short or tall, not necessarily young and attractive, perhaps even becoming middleaged and stout, though not too old—who lived in such a teeming midtown section. A woman preferably without intimates or friends, shy or unsocial by nature, or best of all one who was a stranger in the city—a woman without any family except her husband, and he with some sort of occupation, such as night newspaperman, taxi driver, subpoena server, or telephone company emergency troubleshooter, which kept him working long, irregular hours away from home.

A woman who lived in some secluded place which was easy to enter and exit from unobserved, preferably with more than one way in and out—perhaps an old

railroad flat with a rear fire escape upon an alley, perhaps an apartment made over from an old basement kitchen, with its own entrance below the front stoop and a rear door to a back yard that had some exit from it.

Not like that flame-haired girl last night, the gambler's wife, amid her pink mirrors and leopard-skin walls, on her bed of white and gold. Not like that greater horror, greater outcry, of the woman clubbed to death in Brooklyn three weeks ago, the wealthy, youngish broker's widow, with her family and friends and social ties and charities, and the big rewards offered for her killer. Not like the weird, aged sisters in their weird, trash-filled old mansion in Hoboken a year ago, lying on the floor in their rat-running kitchen, interrupted in their after-supper card game, their skulls crushed with the old-fashioned coal-stove poker, their deck of dog-eared seventy-year-old playing-cards with pansies on the back lying scattered on the table and floor, nor like the blonde beauty shop owner and her young daughter on Staten Island in '48, on Valentine's day.

Nor like Aunt Nellie, poor old Aunt Nellie, either, who had brought him up, who had humored all his queeresses, praised him and exalted him as a genius with a rare, original mind, fought to defend him switch and claw against the boys who had jeered at him and badgered him.

Poor old Aunt Nellie, who had had a stroke after Brenda had been killed, the stout, gray, good-natured practical nurse who had married him and mothered him at her desire, because he had been found by the people who had burst in so rudely planning his next chess move, oblivious to her. The idiotic psychiatrists with their bald heads and shiny glasses and long gobbledygook words had said he was insane and must be confined to a place for crazy criminals—a bunch of dough poor old Aunt Nellie must have shelled

out to those fine-feathered halfwits, too, who didn't have the simple intelligence to know that chess is a highly brainy game, and that when you're in check you've got to concentrate on your next move to get out of it.

White queen's rook to black king's knight's pawn, and check—he had figured out now the move he should have made. But he hadn't seen it right away. And he had been interrupted.

Poor old Aunt Nellie! Smothered in her bed in her suite in the President at Ocean Beach the end of August, while her nurse had been taking her time off. Rolled over on her face with a quick hand, not even seeing who had come in through the door that she would not let be locked for fear of fire, for fear of being trapped. Her head held down, and suffocated in her pillow without a sound. The money and jewelry beneath her mattress, in the hiding place all paralyzed old women use, quickly and expertly taken.

No newspaper outcry about Aunt Nellie's murder. Nothing at all suspicious in the scene, no proof of any intruder. A certificate of accident issued by her doctor, and the local police satisfied. Though because she had been rich, because she had been named Wintringham, there had been that New York Homicide man with the dark, reflective eyes who had gone quietly down to Ocean Beach, Detective Sergeant Higgins, with some other detective named Gilfogle or Gilrymple or Gilfish, to investigate it. Strange that that fellow Higgins was a Harvard man, too. Had actually stuck it out for his degree. Well, it took all kinds.

Somewhere around a teeming midtown neighborhood like this—supermarket, cheap movies, convenient subway, old, dingy, converted brownstones with furnished housekeeping rooms, the far-flung throngs, the obscurity of poverty—somewhere around here he would find her, a nameless housewife, living in such a place.

That was the drifting picture in his mind. That was his quarry and his goal.

He had made an error before, back at the beginning, after he had finished his daily chess game in the newspaper and was starting off, by turning left instead of turning right. From there he had been thrown off. But he would correct the error now. He was back at the thronging corner. His sad brown spaniel eyes beneath his sodden hatbrim were quietly seeking. The flanges of his nostrils were twitching.

CHAPTER THREE

Nightmare

SHE hadn't gone directly home from the supermarket. From the door, with her sack clasped in her arms, she had turned left, not right. Up towards the thronging subway corner, not down towards the side street.

It wasn't that the long hlock and long half block along the narrow street was too dark and little traversed, necessarily. Nor necessarily that, when she should get home, she would be utterly alone. But a feeling in her, an urge to communicate with someone, to say some word. Though whom to speak to, or what to say, she didn't know.

MANIAC KILLER LOOSE, AMOK

A later paper was on the newsstand beside the subway stairs than the one she had bought. But she couldn't try to find a nickel in her purse now, clasped against her body beneath her sack. And it would do her no good to read anything more about it. It had done her no good to read about it at all. Girl named Fanya who might have been a girl named Dora. Other killings, other horrors.

She pushed into the tiny corner cigar store, a little breathless, out of the thronging street. There were three or four

people waiting to use the single phone booth at the rear.

The booth was still occupied, the others waiting. She would get it eventually, though. After the fat man and the old man and the mascaraed girl. She could see herself already sitting down inside, with the door closed, and dialing.

Is this police headquarters?

Police headquarters.

May I have Homicide, please?

Do you want to report a homicide?

They would, of course, ask that.

Oh, no! Just a personal call.

Who's calling?

Mrs. Gilrymple—Detective Gilrymple's wife.

This is Homicide.

My name is Dora Gilrymple, Detective Gilrymple's wife.

Detective Gilrymple? He's out on the street.

Do you know when he'll be in?

No, but I can leave a message for him when he comes in, if it's anything important.

I just wondered what time he would be home tonight. Do you happen to know?

Lady, this is Homicide. We've got a maniac to look for. How can he or anybody know?

Or perhaps Tim would be in. Himself would answer.

Homicide—Detective Gilrymple speaking.

Tim.

Who is it? Dora? What do you mean by calling me up on duty? What do you want?

With that dark anger surging up in him which she had never seen aroused, but which she knew lay in him beneath the quiet, impassive surface, the quiet watching, the quiet listening, the rare, quiet smile.

What is it, Dora? You're afraid of something? You've been reading the

damned newspapers about this maniac? Go home! Go on back home! Slide the bolts and put the chain on, if you feel jittery. I'll be back eventually.

And, click!

Or it might be Mr. Higgins who would answer—she composed another conversation in her mind.

Homicide—Detective Sergeant Higgins speaking.

This is Dora Gilrymple, Mr. Higgins—Dora Turner. You remember meeting me with Tim and Bessie Minnix at Ocean Beach the end of August.

Oh, yes, Mrs. Gilrymple. Tim told me you and he had gotten married. What can I do for you?

(Impersonal, aloof and coolly courteous. Annoyed at her because Tim had married her, a casual summer evening's date, a little fool.)

Why, I just wondered how you were getting on.

How completely idiotic he would think her!

What did you really call me up for, Mrs. Gilrymple? he would say.

Why, nothing. That is, I mean I don't know. There isn't any reason. I'm just afraid.

Of this homicidal maniac? That he'll get you? My dear child, there are four million females in the city of all ages, and any one of them, it may be, equally liable to attract the lightning. Do you want a uniformed man assigned to guard you personally? Do you want Tim to stay home with you while the rest of Homicide scours the city for him?

No, there was nothing in calling up the police.

Yet, besides Tim, Mr. Higgins was the only person she knew in the whole city.

Oh, Bessie Minnix! Think of a living soul, and you thought of her. A brick-faced, healthy soul. A nurse. Her name should be in one of the phone books.

She would dial, when her turn came,

and say, *Hello, this is Dora Turner from Ocean Beach last summer. You remember, we met on the beach and we had dinner at the Jungle Club. His friend Mr. Gilrymple and I went on to the Paradise, and the next day we were married. I'm living in the city now, not very far away from you, and I thought I'd like to see you again.*

And Bessie Minnix might say, *That's nice. We must get together sometime.*

But she hoped that warm, good-hearted Bessie Minnix would say, *Isn't that lovely! I'm so glad to hear from you, Dora. I had wondered what had become of you. Did you actually marry that good looking Mr. Gilrymple? Can't you come over and tell me all about it?*

She should have looked up Bessie Minnix long ago, even if Tim hadn't liked her.

The fat man had come out of the booth, the old man was in. It was her turn after him and the mascaraed girl.

She waited till the girl had finished her conversation and hung up, with a triumphant smile, and had touched up her lips, and arisen and came out. Then she was in.

She couldn't find a nickel in her purse. Only pennies and the quarter she had got at the supermarket. She had a feeling that Bessie Minnix was getting ready to go out this moment. That she was putting on her hat and coat and moving towards the door. She dropped the quarter in the slot and dialed.

The phone gave its unanswered ring. Unanswered ring. She knew then that in that moment while she had been searching for a nickel, Bessie had gone out the door.

Or hours ago. It made no difference. Bessie was not there. On a case, perhaps out of the city. She let the phone ring twenty times before hanging up and taking her returned quarter out of the slot and leaving the booth.

She had felt that frantic urge to communicate with someone, to say some word. But she had spoken no word to anyone. There was no one to call to.

SHE picked up her grocery sack from beneath the counter, and went out into the corner throng with it. It seemed to her that she had been inside a long time. In that time she could have walked many blocks. Home more than once. But she hadn't. She was still at the subway corner. She turned quickly left along the cross-thoroughfare.

She went across the avenue with the green light. The muscles of her thighs felt strained with the weight of her clasped sack, with her hurrying—instinctive, uncontrolled. The throngs on the sidewalk in front of her, behind her, some shabby forms casting glances at her with slowing steps as she passed—she hadn't looked at them, she hadn't looked around.

Across the avenue, she kept on. Only the half block now, then down the paved mid-block alley—a way she sometimes came and went—and she would be home.

Dingier after the last avenue, farther from the thronging subway corner. Fewer coming towards her, fewer steps behind. She was almost running now. She darted swiftly left into the deserted fifteen-foot-wide alley, only eighty or ninety steps more to go to the front basement door of the brownstone house beside the alley, facing on the next street.

She was more than halfway along the alley, she was passing the four-foot-high board fence of the cluttered backyard, the dark rear of the house looming above her, the barred basement bay-window at ground-level hardly more than a dozen feet away from her across the board fence top, with the bridge-lamp that she had left on when she went out shining through the drawn shades—she had slowed her pace to catch her breath, when she became aware of him.

She looked back over her shoulder and saw him coming behind her down the alley. Just a faceless man with pulled-down hatbrim, hands in his raincoat pockets.

Whether he had followed her all the way from the cigar store at the subway corner she didn't know, or whether he had been waiting in a dark doorway near the alley mouth. Or had just at that moment turned down it by chance and seen her ahead of him, who was his prey.

She felt the still, mute sensation of the paralyzed rabbit, an anesthesia beyond pain, beyond all fear. Almost a surge of relief that the formless terror had taken shape and substance.

She fled toward the alley mouth ahead, and out of it. On the sidewalk she turned breathlessly, plunging down the basement steps below the front stoop. She pushed in through the half-grilled, dim-curtained basement door, which was left unlocked till the deaf old landlady made her rounds late at night. She fled down the basement hallway, lit by a dim yellow bulb, past the half open doors of the dark trunk room, the laundry room, the warm, oil-smelling furnace room, towards the blue-painted door with its brass barrel lock. Stooping, she set her sack down on the floor against the doorpost, not dropping it—eggs, be careful of them! She dug into her purse with quick, cold, unfeeling fingers for her key.

She had it out. Front basement door opening behind her. Quick! Cool and steady. Don't think of it. She thrust the key in, turned it, pushed the door open and pulled out the key, stooped and dragged her sack in after her across the threshold. She pushed the door shut behind her with her knee and hip, with her whole insensate body, seeing him just in the glimpse of its closing coming with his pale, oily face, soft, silky mustache, sad eyes beneath his hatbrim, hands in soiled raincoat pockets.

She thrust the big brass bolt across in its slot and turned it downward, leaning against the stout panels, breathing quietly. She turned the hand bolt. She fitted the chain in its slot, and tugged it to make sure.

He was there on the other side of the door. Rack! Rack! on the knocker.

"Who is it?" she said.

"A friend of your husband's."

His voice so sad and gentle. With tears in it, like death.

"Yes," she said. "Where do you know him?"

"We work in the same place."

"Oh, yes," she said. "What is he like?"

"Why, he's a sort of a quiet man."

"Yes," she said. "What is his name?"

"Why, his name is Gill. His name is T. Gill."

He was reading the name in the cardholder on the door. Precaution against the criminal seeking out the place where Detective Tim Gilrymple might live. But not the prowling maniac, the lunatic not seeking him, to whom his name meant nothing.

"And your name?" she said.

"Charlie."

The door was heavy and strong, the bolts and chain unbreakable. Yet she felt her knees like water for the moment at the soft, sad name. The name which she had first heard like the quiet pattering of rain, on a night at the beginning of this dream. *Charlie.*

"What do you want?" she managed to say.

"Why, I just wanted to talk to you until your husband comes home."

"About that girl last night?" she dared to say. "That girl named Fanya?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't mention her," he said sadly, "nor any of the others. Unless you wanted."

"Go away," she said, with a dryness in her throat, her voice failing her. "Go away. If you want to take anything, there

are my husband's family's things in the trunk room, the front basement door to the right, in the old cardboard boxes in the storage place marked 'Gill'. He has the padlock key, but you can break in easily, I suppose. They just look like old boxes full of old household things, worth nothing, but there are some silver pieces, I think, and perhaps some other valuable things. Take what you want and go."

"Thank you so much," he said gently.

SHE leaned against the door, bracing it. She listened. She thought that he had turned away from the other side of it. She thought she heard him in the trunk-room, prowling, pulling a padlock staple out of old, shrunk, dry wood, rummaging. She shook her hood back from her fair hair and unbuttoned her raincoat with a finger, still holding against the door. . . . She thought she heard the front basement door open and close quietly, with him going.

She held against the door with shaking muscles, a dry throat, listening, unbreathing. So soft, so gentle, with his soft, slaving lies, his voice like a mourner at the grave.

She had thought she had heard him going, but had he gone? She held against the door.

It was the snap of the rear window-shade behind her, whipping up on its roller, that caused her to turn her head. Across the room, lit by the bridge lamp at the couch end, she saw the window like a clear and terrible picture. The shade was up. The framework of iron bars outside was there no longer—the bars, she realized, were hinged like a gate, not set in the cement, and the gate had been swung back. The lower half of the window, that she had thought locked, had been pulled up—the lock must have been broken metal glued together, or else set in rotten wood or putty. In the bare square of empty space he was stepping

in across the low sill from the floor-level back yard outside, with the raw darkness framing him, bending his head beneath the upper frame, his sad eyes upon her.

"I knew that there would be more than one way in and out," he said.

She could not undo the bolts, unchain the chain, of the door in front of her. Not in time. Not at all.

"You are crazy," she told him. "Your name is Charlie Wintringham, and you are crazy."

"Is that a kind thing to say?" he said.

"My husband is a police officer," she told him.

"That may well be," he said.

"He is in Homicide," she told him.

"His name is Tim Gilrymple. He is a big, relentless man, he has a gun, and he is coming home soon."

"That may well be," he said.

"He will arrest you," she told him. "He will kill you."

"Oh, I doubt that," he said.

Coming towards her quietly from the window. The bones of her body were like water. Like a paralyzed bird, beyond all feeling, beyond terror. This was it. The often imagined, often nightmared death in this small den, in the heart of the great faceless city.

But for the moment yet he closed no hands about her throat, picked up no bludgeon. Three feet from her, in the middle of the room, he paused in his quiet advance.

He paused. He turned his eyes towards the game-table standing in front of the couch, beneath the bridge lamp at the couch end, with the inlay chessboard on its top, where chessmen stood in battled disarray, in the unfinished game which Tim had set up and begun when they had first come here to live—sitting pondering in the evenings over it.

Motionless, looking at the unfinished game. He moved towards the chessboard, resting a thigh on the couch arm, leaning

over it with sloping shoulders while he studied it. He pulled a hand out of his raincoat pocket, seized a white piece, and moved it swiftly from right to left across the board.

"White queen's rook to black king's knight's pawn," he said. "Check."

His lunatic mind was caught for the moment only by the game, it seemed. Through all her body there was a sagging like snapped bands. Not now. Not this moment. A moment of reprieve. But she could not gather strength to run past him and plunge with bent head swiftly out through the bare square of open, unbarred window into the raw back yard dark. She sank down mute into a chair, dropping her raincape from her, weeping with dry inaudible sobs for the reprieve she had not asked for, for the awakening which had not yet come to her, within this nightmare dream.

"Your move," he said. "But I mean his, of course. Your husband's. He's the chess player. You could hardly be. We've often played together—I know him, did I tell you? He will be coming soon, you say?"

She tensed her knuckles, quiet.

"Yes," she said with a calm exhalation, with a fixed and pleasant smile, as if she were entertaining a fellow-townsmen who had dropped in to see Grandfather Turn-er back in the library in Sharon.

"You are pretty," he said gently. "You are really quite unusually pretty, in a childlike way. Much more than I'd expected. I wonder if you still have valentine parties and believe in fairies? But you are married, of course, and not so young as she. If I were your husband you would not die. Brenda was twice as old as you. She was more like a mother, but Aunt Nellie thought that she'd be good for me.

"I'm glad that you're not alarmed. Not at all frightened. Frightened women make me ill. They give me a dreadful headache, and when I have a headache I can't see.

It's really horrible to be that way. . . . Your husband will be coming soon, you think? Don't bother to try thinking up conversation to entertain me. I have the board to study. I can wait."

The nightmare dream. The quiet voice, the quiet and tender look—the mask suddenly jerked away, the distorted maniac face beneath, the murderous, insane laugh as brutal pain and blackness smashed on her.

Still with her, as always, as from the beginning, in this place, the vast city all around, the million shifting faces, the myriad pulse and throb and breathing, the incessant muted cry, the deep, dreamlike horror of that moment.

Tim would be coming. He would be coming eventually, though not tonight finding her in darkness and asleep. Like last night a girl named Fanya, tonight a girl named Dora. How long before death would strike her, how long before he would come, she didn't know. She only hoped that at the chessboard patiently the pale sad man would wait. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

The Laughing Loon

TIM GILRYMPLE leaned back against the door he had come through, with his newspaper in his hand, and laughed.

George, old George Higgins, the sarge, was sitting at the desk building a tower of cards.

You would think a thirty-five-year-old man would be past the age of playing with blocks and paper dolls, or not quite old enough for them yet. Anybody seeing him would take him for a nut.

Tim Gilrymple laughed again at old George with complete pleasure and amusement. He straightened from the door, came forward and plunked himself down in the swivel chair across the desk, tilting

back his broad shoulders, pushing his gray snapbrim back on his head and elevating his brogues to the edge of the desk top. He tossed his newspaper onto it.

"That's a bright one," he said.

The flimsy tower which George Higgins had been building collapsed in the airwash and slap of the paper's drop. Walls and floors tumbled, lay spilled and jackstrawed. Old George set down the card that his hand had been hovering to place—a trey of spades—and lifted his head reproachfully.

"You didn't need to do that, Tim," he said.

"Be your age, pal," said Tim Gilrymple quietly and impassively. "Towers of cards won't get you anywhere, in homicide or out of it, if you built them to the moon. I'm telling you as a brother, George, you're slipping, and nobody knows it except the captain, the inspector, the commissioner, all the newspapers, me and the rest of the squad. Better cut out the kid play . . . Christmas! That's a brilliant story to get published! You'll have the whole burg haywire before you know it, every woman in it running around squawling at her own shadow. What was the point?"

He nodded to the newspaper he had thrown.

"Charlie?" George Higgins said somewhat haggardly, not looking at it. "Not my fault it leaked, Tim. I'd have done anything to have kept it under the lid as long as possible, it stands to reason. But some ninety-buck-a-month attendant up there at the squirrel-coop must have missed Charlie's winsome face, long time no see, and started checking on him.

"Looks like he checked around and found that Wintringham, C., who had been transferred from his own ward back there, wasn't in the ward he'd been shifted to, and wasn't in any other, either," he said wryly. "So bright boy added it up that somebody who wasn't in was out, in

spite of the records. He figured reasonably enough that some big shot had been greased about fifteen thousand bucks to let a mild, pleasant, well-bred paranoid ooze quietly out of the gate. But instead of taking it to his superiors, he figured that he might as well make himself a sawbuck by tipping it to a newspaper reporter."

He picked a card up in his spread fingers and dropped it on the desk again.

"I'm not worried about Charlie," Tim Gilrymple said.

He pulled a cigar from his breast pocket.

"Good old Charlie," he said, pulling off the cellophane wrapper, with his rare quiet smile. "He still sticks in my mind as the bird with the most perfect screwball alibi. He was playing chess, therefore he couldn't have killed her.

"Christmas day!" he said. "Her lying in the bedroom not twenty feet from him, face all smashed up, arm judoed and busted, slammed with her heavy silver hairbrush from the bureau top and the back of her skull splintered, after she had screamed enough to wake a guy across the court who had phoned down to the desk. But Charlie didn't know anything about it, he couldn't have done it, because he had been playing chess and his white queen was in danger and his white king in check.

He crumpled the cellophane wrapper

into a ball and flipped it towards an ashtray between the telephones on the desk. He pulled off the band and bit off the end of his cigar. He lit it with the last match of a paper pack, glanced at the match cover—silver with two blackbirds on it—The Blackbird Grill, West 14th Street, one that he didn't have in his collection—and stuck it back in a pocket of his vest. He blew smoke.

"Saw him in the lineup," he said. "Mild, inoffensive-looking little bird."

"I'd forgotten the M. E.'s report said that her arm had been busted in a judo throw," George Higgins said, picking up a card and dropping it.

"Well, maybe it wasn't judo," Tim Gilrymple said. "It wasn't a thing I worked on at all. I probably just put that in as I interpreted it. . . . How much was passed to get him out of the coop, and who got it, or have they found that out yet, George?"

But he didn't wait for a reply from George Higgins.

"Makes no difference," he said. "He'll be picked up before too long, now that it's known he's out. He had his one explosion, and he's just a burned-out firecracker. Probably it was being married to that slugging Swede that made him go all bang—and ex-masseuse, wasn't she, ex-practical nurse in a sanitarium, bigger and tougher than the ordinary man? Who can blame him? To hell with Charlie, anyway. . . .



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"This damned tripe in the Five-star edition is what I mean, George. 'Detective-Sergeant George Higgins says that in his personal opinion,' and so forth. Tying up a bunch of unrelated homicides in one package—this babe last night with the Ordway dame, with that decayed-tomb killing last year over in Jersey and that thing on Staten Island in '48—labeling them all done by the same bird, and calling him a maniac. I suppose the wolf pack got to you, yowling all around you, and you had to toss them something to keep them from tearing off your pants. But you certainly thought up a bright one to throw to them. Just out of your own head."

George Higgins picked up a card from the desk in front of him—a glossy card of expensive linen weave with an English castle on the back—and dropped it a little tiredly.

"They'd got at me, all right," he said. "I didn't mean to toss them the baby. I was just too damned tired. But what's so wrong with that?"

"What's so wrong?" said Tim Gilymphe, with his face impassive, reasonably and quietly patient. "You know the answer as well as I do, George. You've been at the game a few years longer. The answer is that every bird who pulls any sort of job has some sort of pattern that he follows in it. If he pulls more than one job, he repeats the pattern, particularly if he's crazy. And all you've got here is just a hodge-podge of damned unrelated homicides, without the remotest tieup, no conceivable resemblance.

"You take last night," he said patiently. "A simple prowling burglary by some professional in that line, who had probably cased the job and found that Curly Durik and his wife were going to be out. Only the babe stayed home, and there she was in her pretty little bed, and this bird didn't especially yearn to have her screech and wake up the neighbors or to remem-

ber his face afterwards—a three-time loser, let's figure it, with the long count facing him—and so he picked up this bit of silk and tied a ribbon around her pretty little throat. Anybody can see how that job happened as well as if he was there, and the sort of bird that did it. A prowler-cat and a garroter. And there you are.

"BUT you take this Ordway job over in Brooklyn in September, that stirred up so much general hell, and it was something entirely different. But that was a box job—bonds and stuff in the wall-safe that he was after—and when some noise he made woke her up and she came down in her nightgown, he used a sap on her and a gun barrel. There you've got a yeggman, a can-opener. Not a prowler-bird, and not a strangler.

"Or you take this living-tomb job over in Hoboken last year—and what have you got? A couple of ancient dames widely reported to have a big pile of cash stashed away in their rotten old house, down there in the brewery district on the edge of the slums. Why, any sort of a skid-row bum could have done that job. Sooner or later some bum was bound to do it, and the old cadavers knew it themselves. . . . Came the night when some bum did. Busted in and batted them with the poker he picked up—you can see he didn't have a sap or gun—and then started looking through all those stacks and palisades and mountains of newspapers from about the year one.

"Collected a couple of G's in old-style five buck bills and ones, maybe. Then the dawn was coming any minute, and he was sick of the rats; and even though he hadn't found the tens and hundreds of thousands that had been reported, he decided he had better fade. Where is he now, George? Down the railroad track. On the rods to San Diego or Vancouver.

"Or you take this job on Staten Island

back in '48—that was before I got on Homicide, but it was a job with fancy trimmings, as I get it. A high-class heist, carefully planned.

"All right," Tim Gilrymple said. "And you tie them all up together, George, all those unrelated things, that hodge-podge of prowler-burglar, yeggman, bum, and heist, and add maybe some more things, too, and label them all one package for the newspapers, done by one guy, and say the guy's a maniac. I just say that's bright. That's brilliant."

George Higgins picked up a card—a new, glossy card with hearts and cupids on the back—and dropped it. He picked up another card—a frayed blue card with a commonplace bicycle pattern on the back—and dropped it.

"It looks that way," he said. "Still, I think you may be arguing only with your mind, Tim, on a purely rational and logical basis, and somewhat against your own feeling and instinct about it. Against the sixth sense you have—I hope you have—like all good cops.

"Yes, damn it!" he said, picking up a card and dropping it. "I know you have it. You feel it about these jobs, too. You had the feeling with old Mrs. Wintringham, when she was reported found smothered. The minute I saw the report on the ticker myself, I had the hunch that there was something in it that tied up with Charlie, with the murder of his wife Brenda, and as soon as I could grab permission to take time off I hopped a plane down there at my own expense for a quick look-see, with the idea of playing bright big-city dick and showing up those fatheaded yokel constables and summer cops.

"I thought that I was bright. I thought that I was quick, and perhaps would be the only one to get the smell of something. But who was the first bird I should spot when I landed at the airport? Big Tim Gilrymple in person, quietly standing back of a post watching the passengers down

and off. . . . You had felt yourself that there was something unexplained in it that might tie up with Charlie, and had beaten me to it."

"Just a loose play," said Tim Gilrymple imperturbably. "She could have been smothered. She could have had stuff beneath her mattress. But nothing to back it up at all. That she had been named Wintringham and was Charlie's aunt was just a crazy damned coincidence. I wish her name had been Butterfield or Schmalz. A wasted play for me, for you. But anyone's entitled once in a while to a wrong bet. We had a nice swim and evening together, George, anyway."

"Yes," George Higgins said a little tiredly, picking up a card and dropping it. "I wish I hadn't wasted time, though, on the old lady's brick-haired nurse. I thought she might have something that a few drinks might bring out, but no. Remember her friend Dora, the little blonde girl with the shy smile whom she brought along for you?"

"Yeah," said Tim Gilrymple quietly. "Sort of."

"You walked out on us with her."

"Yeah," Tim Gilrymple said quietly. "I took her on to someplace else for another dance or two. Not much of a conversationalist, but a good dancer. I hated to leave you stuck, George, but I couldn't stand brick-top, and she wasn't my baby."

"Seen her since?" George Higgins said.

"Who? Brick-top?"

"No, the little blonde girl Dora. Dora Turner."

Tim Gilrymple laced his broad clean hands together on his topcoated chest, with legs stretched out contentedly. He exhaled smoke around his cigar.

"Why should I?" he said quietly. "Just an evening's date. We had a few dances, that was all."

"I thought for a while you might have," George Higgins said, picking up a soiled card with pansies on the back and drop-

ping it. "I rather liked her. She rather hit me. You know how it is, Tim. Or maybe you don't. But you meet a girl sometime in your li'e, and there's something about her that rings the gong.

"I rather had the idea you'd fallen for her, George," Tim Gilrymple said quietly, drawing on his cigar. "Why didn't you look her up the next day?"

"I did," George Higgins confessed somewhat miserably. "I'll admit it, Tim. You had told me you were taking the midnight to go on up to the Poconos. I stayed overnight at the Fairlee, and went around the next morning to the place where she worked and lived. Some second-rate joint three blocks back from the beach, the Gilmore. But she had phoned in that morning that she was quitting, they told me, and had asked them to pack and check her bag.

"I tried to find out where her home town was, but nobody knew. I left a note for her and five bucks with the porter to let me know where she had her bag forwarded to. But I never heard from her. Some other man has got her now, of course. I only hope he's decent to her. That he takes care of her. Sometime—"

ONE of the phones on the desk rang. George Higgins picked it up. "Yeah," he said. "Okay. Never mind. He's here." He set the phone down again.

"Put in a call to leave a message for you at the Millard Fillmore," he said. "I forgot. That was a report that the Fillmore had just called to say you hadn't been in as yet. You aren't living there anymore?"

"No," said Tim Gilrymple imperturbably. "Got myself a quiet little place not too far away. There are some birds who like to know too much about you in this business, I've always figured. A detective is better off with his private life private. I still get my mail at the Fillmore, though, and they take telephone

messages for me. Still my legal address."

"That's what they told me," George Higgins said, with a gesture of his hand. "I think you're off your base, Tim, in imagining that crooks or their pals may be laying for you all the time, and that you've got to change your address periodically and lie low. After all, plenty of other boys in Homicide are married and live ordinary lives. An attitude of mind like that can run into this what-do-you-call-it thing—delusions of persecution—before you know it. I was passing by the Fillmore at noon, and dropped in to see if you were in. That was when I learned you hadn't had a room there since you left for your vacation on August twenty-fifth in the Poconos."

Tim Gilrymple unclasped his hands. He took his cigar out of his mouth, knocked the ash off its end, and replaced it between his lips, chewing it.

"What did you want?" he said.

"I thought I might put you on Charlie this afternoon," George Higgins said. "But that's all right. I've got Bill Blair and Solomon on him."

Tim Gilrymple put his feet down on the floor. He straightened his snaphrim down on his forehead. He brushed off a flake of ash which had fallen on the lapel of his silky gabardine topcoat, and stood up easily.

"Christmas!" he said. "I'm not a downy-billed tufted nutcatcher. I'm a Homicide man. Blair and Solomon can have Charlie, and to hell with him. The poor screwball isn't going to bite anybody. He couldn't even play chess."

"Knocking off?" George Higgins said, picking up a card with red dice and golden horseshoes on a silver background on its back, and dropping it. "I suppose you can be reached at the Fillmore if necessary, as usual."

"Not yet," Tim Gilrymple said. "Just going to wrap myself around a steak down at the one-eyed Greek's. I'm hungry. I've

got plenty more to do before I knock off. Went around to the hardware boys this morning with a moulage of those jimmy marks on the Durik door. They sell them by the tens of thousands for opening packing-cases and crates, and general household use."

He pulled his gray suede gloves out of his topcoat pocket, and drew them on his big, clean hands. He laughed at George Higgins, without a sound. Without the rippling of a muscle of his quiet, imperturbable face.

George Higgins picked up the frayed old card with the pansies on its back again, and dropped it.

Tim Gilrymple took his cigar out of his mouth.

"Where did you get those cards?" he said.

He put it back and chewed it, with a quiet smile.

"I mean," he said, "they're all different I thought you were playing with a pack."

George Higgins picked up the pansy-backed card again, and tossed it halfway across the polished surface of the desk.

"One of the old miser sisters' seventy-year-old whist cards in Hoboken," he said, "the night they died."

He picked up a card with an English castle on its back, and tossed it over.

"One of Mrs. Ordway's cards from Brooklyn," he said, "three weeks ago."

He picked up the plain blue bicycle card, and tossed it.

"One of Mrs. Brenda Wintringham's cards," he said, "Charlie's wife, from the night when she was battered and killed in their suite in the Park-Marseilles last May."

He picked up the card with the pink flamingo on a silver background, and tossed it.

"One of Mrs. Charles Wintringham, senior's cards from her room in the President in Ocean Beach last August thirtieth," he said. "Scattered on the floor

beside her bed where she lay suffocated."

He picked up the new glossy unused card with the hearts and cupids on its back, and tossed it.

"Mrs. Honey Markling, the blonde beauty-shop owner," he said, "and her fifteen-year-old daughter, Faith, in their little bungalow in New Brighton, Staten Island, at three o'clock in the morning on St. Valentine's Day, in '48—the queen of hearts, the party planned, the girl so young to die."

He picked up a silver card with red dice and golden horseshoes on it.

"A girl named Fanya," he said, "amidst her pink mirrors and leopard-skin walls, in her bed of white and gold in the Bronx last night."

He swept his lean, delicate hand out dextrously, and gathered them all together, stacking them.

"Cards," he said. "A deck with one card missing has no value. There's no game that you can play with it. If you lose a card from a deck, an ordinary person, you give the deck to children who collect and trade them, or throw the deck away."

"Who would look at a common deck of playing-cards and count them, with everything else there might be to examine in a murder scene and think about? I don't know why I did. But I picked the deck up, for no reason, probably just tired and vacant, and counted them. And found there was one missing—the spade trey."

"There was no meaning in it, and I dismissed it from the front of my mind. She might have been meaning to throw the useless deck away. Or maybe the card had dropped to the floor and been picked up and thrown away, of no importance. It was just in my mind, that was all that there had been that incomplete deck on the Charlie Wintringham scene, when the ticker news came in that Mrs. Charles Wintringham, senior, had been accidentally suffocated in Ocean Beach."

"Cards again," he said reflectively. "I

flew down there on a hunch, as you know, right away. To find that you had heard about it in the Poconos, Tim, and had flown down ahead of me, with less even than cards to go on.

"The cards that had been on the bed and floor had been gathered up. No prints. But I counted them, and there was one missing. The ten of clubs.

"It might have been just chance again. An incomplete deck that had been intended for the wastebasket. But I asked the brick-haired nurse when I was dating her on the boardwalk, and she knew nothing of the deck being incomplete—old Mrs. Wintringham had played with them after supper, only an hour or two before, and would certainly have spoken about it, and asked her to get a new deck when she went out, if the cards hadn't been all there.

"Then three weeks ago—September 25th, Brooklyn. Mrs. Ordway. A gentle and charitable woman who believed in human kindness. Beaten to death while on her knees, pleading that she would not betray the savage man who had broken in. On her library table beside her body there was a boxed deck of cards, apparently undisturbed. But I counted them, this time, first thing. One missing—the diamond six.

"I CHECKED back on the contents of the Markling death-scene," he said, "one of the reddest things on our books. The stuff was still in the property-clerk's custody, and the boxes were located and dug out. Among the items was a pack of new Valentine playing cards from the girl's bedroom table, probably bought for the party that afternoon. The seal was loose, but the pack was in its wrapper inside the box and seemed untouched. Upon examining it, however, I found the ace of spades had been taken from it.

"The Hoboken police let me examine the objects they had collected at the Kirschmann sisters' scene—a thing that

came back to me because they had been playing a card game when death crept in and found them. Enough objects to fill a junkyard in that kitchen, and not all had been kept. But the quaint old pansy-backed whist cards scattered on the table had been kept. One card missing. The club deuce, I think. Or it may have been the four.

"Meaningless," he said. "So damned meaningless. Not even the same card. Just any card. But in a maniac way it was meaningful as hell. A card collector.

"No doubt almost everyone has collected something as a boy—stamps, match covers, bird's eggs, butterflies, bubblegum-packet pictures of movie and big-league baseball stars. Playing cards among the commonest. Some men keep up their collections all their lives. But this is a bird, a laughing loon, who has his own small, choice and unique collection of murder playing cards.

"These cards—" he stacked them in his hands again— "are samples from those murder decks. Somewhere in this city there is a man who has cards with the same backs, from the same decks. And no doubt more, from other decks that we don't know about. He has them in the place he hides away in, to take out and gloat over in secret. A maniac.

"The cards," he said, "plus the very simple fact that he always wore gloves and never left a fingerprint, tie up all those unrelated murders. Tim. Those murders without any pattern otherwise except robbery and profit, those misasorted stranglings, quiet smotherings, savage poker and mirror brainings, bloody knifings, those gun and sap clubbings of women on their knees—those prowlers, yeggmen's, skidrow-hum's, maniac homicides. They all did come from the same attic, Tim. They fit in the same dumpheap. They were all done by a laughing madman who thinks he's as smart as hell."

Tim Gilrymple had started to pull off his gray suede gloves. He left them on. He thrust his cigar in his mouth and chewed it, with his rare quiet smile.

"Charlie?" he said. "You mean that, after all, it's been Charlie all along? How long has he been on the loose, you mean, George? Before he slammed the hell out of that screaming Swede he was married to he had pulled those Hoboken and Staten Island jobs, naturally. He was on the loose at the time of old Aunt Nellie in Ocean Beach, you've found out now, I take it. And of course the Ordway job, and last night in the Bronx. How much dough was passed to spring him, and who got it?"

"I got him out," said George Higgins haggardly.

"You," said Tim Gilrymple, "got that crazy screwball out?"

"Yes," George Higgins said, "I staked my reputation and career on it. I would have gone to the governor with it, but I sold the commissioner, and he decided to play ball with me, at the risk of his own neck. . . . Charlie may be crazy as a coot, Tim, but he has the kind of mind that tells him how a maniac would act and think. A maniac who is ten times as crazy as a coot. He's had a long time to figure such a maniac out, Tim. To think as that maniac would think.

"That was the story Charlie got to me from the nut factory, that he could find him. That was the argument he sold me, and I sold to the commissioner. I got him released by court order of three judges sitting in secret session yesterday morning, in my custody. Until this damned story broke, there weren't six citizens, including the commissioner and the head out at the asylum, who knew that he was out, besides me and the boys tailing him."

"Only yesterday?" Tim Gilrymple said. "Tailing him?"

"That's right," George Higgins said. "Tailing him and guarding him, eating

with him and keeping watch on him while he sleeps, every hour of the day and night.

"Right in the heart of the city, Tim, that's where that maniac is holed up, Charlie says. Right near some subway line, right between Staten Island and Hoboken, between Brooklyn and the Bronx. Some quiet, secluded sort of furnished place that Charlie claims he can half close his eyes and almost see, and spread his nostrils and almost smell.

"He can't tell us where. A shifting picture in his mind. A crazy instinct. But he's going to lead us to him, to his lair. He was prowling different midtown sections steadily, with Jenks and Forsbie tailing him, from four o'clock yesterday afternoon, when he was brought to town, till three o'clock this morning, after Curly Durik had reported his wife murdered and I had discovered the missing card, and knew it was over for the night.

"Jenks and Forsbie took him to a hotel then. Eleven hours of screwball following of a maniac, straining himself to think as a maniac would think, and Charlie was dead beat. But at seven o'clock this morning, after four hours sleep, he was up again and at it. He was too late last night to save a girl named Fanya, but he may be in time to save some girl tonight named—well, how do we know?"

"Where is he now?" asked Tim.

George Higgins opened the top drawer of his desk and took out a folder.

"This morning he covered the Columbus Circle area and the Bowery, Williamsburgh and East 14th, with Jenks and Forsbie," he said, reading. "This afternoon he took on Hell's Kitchen and Chelsea. He was all played out—and Jenks and Forsbie were clean played out, not having had any sleep at all—by three o'clock, so they took him back to his hotel for a nap. Blair and Solomon took over then, as relief—I had wanted to put you on him with Solomon yourself, Tim, but you were out.

"He should be about waking up now and starting out again. He was going to cover the Village and West—"

One of the phones on the desk rang. George Higgins reached for it across the folder.

"Yeah?" he said. "What? Oh, joy in hell! Yes, of course! Send out the alarm for him! One of the midtown sections somewhere! Every car and every cop! Better give it to all the commercial stations, too, to broadcast to the public! Yes! I'll wait."

He looked around with the phone at his ear.

"Got away from Blair and Solomon!" he said. "Must've waked up and slipped out a side door without telling them, assuming they would know and follow him! See what you can do, Tim—Tim?"

But Tim Gilrymple, with his quiet eyes, his quiet, impressive face, had already gone out . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

Crazy Corpse

HE CAME in through the open square of window from the raw darkness of the cluttered backyard, the big, quiet darkly handsome man whom she had met that evening six weeks ago at Ocean Beach on the double date with Bessie Minnix and Mr. Higgins—that evening which was the beginning of all the nightmare dream.

The big, quiet, darkly handsome man who had eaten his steak that evening and drunk his beer and lit and smoked his cigar, listening imperturbably to Bessie Minnix gabble about her dead patient. Who had met the troubled look of his friend Mr. Higgins with some quiet, amused remark about Charlie. Who had not been interested in her at all, who had hardly noticed her existence, until Mr.

Higgins and Bessie had got up to dance, when she had told him, trying to make conversation, that she had seen him several times during the last few days dining in the rear booth of the Gilmore coffee shop.

Who had smiled at her then, with his rare quiet smile, and had said not to tell his friend George, because George thought he had been up in the Poconos the past five days playing golf and fishing, just coming down today, and he wanted to kid old George about some of the holes-in-one he had made and the record fish he had caught, making George green with envy. Who had taken her wrist and dragged her up to dance, and had asked her all about herself, finding out how Grandfather Turner had died and there had been nothing left, and how she hadn't wanted to stay among all the small-town sympathetic eyes and consoling offers of help. Of how she had seen the job at the Gilmore here in Ocean Beach advertised in a New York paper and had come down, and how they had taken her, even without experience, because she was good at figures, and had been willing to work long hours for not much more than her room and board. And of how nobody back home knew where she was or what she was doing, and nobody here knew where she had come from.

The big, quiet, darkly handsome man, with his quiet, impassive face, his strong hands, who had taken her on, away from Bessie Minnix and his friend Mr. Higgins, to the small, hot, smoky Paradise, the tom-tom drummers, the swirling lights, and the drinks that he had insisted that she swallow. Who had become swiftly dominant and aggressive, talking of elopement, marriage, some minister who could be waked up tonight in Elm City just beyond the state line, where they didn't need a license.

That confused, that terrifying night, the beginning of all the nightmare dreams.

The nightmare that hadn't ended. That was with her yet.

Like a paralyzed rabbit, paralyzed bird. Watching the rattlesnake whose red eyes say, *I see you, and I come.*

He came through the window quietly, bending his snapbrimmed head, broad-shouldered, in his rippling silky gabardine coat, hands in its pockets.

He had tried the front door, no doubt, in his careful, soundless way, but had found it chained and bolted. So around to the back way, the other way in and out if need be—the bars that could be swung back like a gate, the window with its latch set in putty. Finding it already open for him.

The dark backyard beside the alley. The red glow of the night above the roofs, the muted, endless cry. Like the shadow of a red lightning that had struck suddenly, far off. Like a far off hunting cry. That night in September, and him so late in, quietly. With the radio announcements, the headlines in the papers the next day about the Ordway killing. The other nights, before and since, when there had been only burglaries, no killings; but he had been out, and had come in so quietly.

Red lightning which had struck far off, at other times, and far off the hunting cry. But now, though the hunting cry was still far off, the red lightning was here.

The end of the nightmare: Death in this dark, cramped, cavelike place which he had found for her.

I see you, and I come.

Only a moment ago she had turned on the little radio, on the table beside the chair which she had only a minute ago sunk into, to find on it some soothing sounds to hold the aberrant man who had come in, who had not harmed her, who had seated himself to wait at the chessboard. Some summons which would wake herself out of this legarthic fatal dream. The small box was just warming up to a low music.

"A visitor," he said with his rare quiet smile. "A visitor with Dora. I see you found your way all right. How are you, Charlie?"

Huddled on the couch arm, the pale man with the sad spaniel eyes and silky mustache sat rubbing his chin, in the way that he himself had of doing at times over the chessboard. Except for pulling off his damp hat and dropping it to the floor, with a careless comb of fingers through his brown, tangled hair, he had not changed his position for the last two or three minutes, since he had sat down at the chessboard and made his move. Figuring out the other moves on the board.

He rubbed his chin, with eyes not lifting from it.

"It had to be someone with a business which might keep him out at irregular hours," he said meditatively. "Which would give him some excuse for being anywhere, if he should be seen. I'd thought of a night police-court reporter or a taxi driver or a subpoena server making his quiet rounds, or perhaps a telephone company emergency repairman. But firemen are sometimes pyromaniacs, and I suppose a homicidé man can be a murderer. . . . white queen's rook takes your black king's knight's pawn," he said. "It took me a long time to figure it. But it removes my white queen from immediate jeopardy, and puts you in check."

TIM GILRYMPIE moved over to the board, with his impassive eyes upon his wife, upon the sad, brown-eyed man. With a gray-gloved left hand he moved a black piece contemptuously at a diagonal across the board.

"Black king's bishop takes your white queen's rook, Charlie," he said. "Check back to you."

"It had to be a man who was married to some woman, with the police search getting hotter," said Charlie Wintringham, rubbing his chin meditatively, ex-

aming the board. "The police pay special attention to single men on a thing like this.

"A single man, in addition," he said meditatively, "has no particular storage place for things—he's not a householder with an attic or a basement, where he can stow away conveniently curious and rare old items which he may happen to pick up, such as Melanesian devil-gods and ivory chessmen and carved walrus tusks.

"A woman without friends," he said, studying the chessboard and rubbing his chin, "preferably one a total stranger in the city, whom he could keep from making any contacts by some frightening tale of enemies seeking him. A woman perhaps a little shy and timid. A woman with no one to talk to. If she should happen to be a woman who might have told someone a thing which would have betrayed him, as for instance that he was at some place when a murder was done which no one but she might know, two birds are in the hand then, wife and informant, and are one bird.

"A woman without any family," he said, "nameless and unknown, and of such unimportance that if she died by the gas stove being left on, or even obviously by violence, her death would cause no great excitement—if it should ever be necessary for him to be unmarried, or he should get a little tired of her."

He put his hand out and took a piece and moved it.

"White king's knight takes your black king's bishop," he said. "Check again."

Tim Gilrymple rubbed his own big, close-shaven chin with his gloved hand. He put his hand on the back of a light chair and drew it up to the other side of the board. He sat down on it, across from Charlie Wintringham.

"Black king's rook takes your white king's knight," he said. "Check! I think that's going to about finish you, Charlie."

"It was money," said Charlie Wint-

ringham in his soft sad voice. "It was money, mockery, and power. And with it also a craziness like hell. I suppose there have been other women that you murdered. Perhaps you started off with another wife, of whom you had grown tired. And found that it was simple, and was fun. So you made it profitable the next time. To give yourself a bigger play, to make yourself doubly secure, you got a job on the cops. But you were crazy. You are crazy now . . . white queen's bishop takes your black king's rook. Check, Gil."

Tim Gilrymple put out his gloved hand quickly. He made a move of his black king. His face was impassive, damp, without a smile. He nodded to the board.

"Black king out of check," he said briefly. "Your move."

"Gil," said Charlie Wintringham sadly. "Wasn't it funny that I should call you Gil? The name just suddenly popped out. It's just suddenly come back to me. You used to come to visit us at the hospital and play games with us, Gil. You said you liked to figure what made us screwballs tick. We played several times together, but I never beat you. I used to have a sort of foggy notion that somehow the picture of the pieces on the board had changed around whenever I had worked up to checkmate you.

"And then that night in our suite in the Park-Marshelles. Brenda had closed her book at one o'clock and gone in the bedroom to take a bath and get to bed, while I set up the chessboard. I was sitting figuring out the first move of the black, when somebody across the board from me moved the black king's bishop's pawn forward two squares, opening. I moved my queen's bishop's pawn. And he moved. And we were in a game.

"We were in a game. I thought I was back in the hospital at San Francisco. It was the same style. I moved, and he moved, and after a while I found my white queen in jeopardy, and my white king in

check. I couldn't figure right away how to get out of it. I sat trying to figure it. Then suddenly everybody was around me, yelling at me and dragging me to my feet.

"I had been playing a game, I told them, out in the hospital in San Francisco. But I wasn't there, they told me, I was here. Brenda had been killed, they told me. I told them that somebody must have slipped in while I'd been playing, that I never locked the door, being afraid of being trapped like my Aunt Nellie. But the door had been locked, they told me, Brenda must have locked it.

"But it couldn't have been that, they showed me. It was awful. It was awful. She had been screaming, too, they said, and had waked people up clear across the court. But I just hadn't heard her. I had been in the hospital in San Francisco, playing chess, just back from those horrible *kamikaze* attacks on the carrier off Okinawa, and in my ears still all the time the roaring and the yelling and screaming of the dead . . . still I wasn't there, I was here.

"It was you who had come in, Gil, wasn't it, through the unlocked door, just prowling, and saw me at the board," he said quietly, sadly. "And laughed to yourself to see old screwball Charlie who had let you move the pieces around on him out in San Francisco, too cracked to know what you had been doing, whenever he had got you in check. And so you came on in quietly and started the game with me. And when I was concentrated over the problem of how I could get out, you went on into the bedroom to see what you could pick up, supposing I was alone.

"Only Brenda was in there. And she screamed at the sight of you, and tried to seize you and hold you. And you smashed her face and judoed her. You snatched up the heavy mirror and the hairbrush and beat and beat her, and you killed her, while I sat in the next room and didn't know. You locked the door. I've figured

it out just now. . . . White queen's knight takes your black queen, Gil," he said in his soft sad voice. "Check, and double-check."

TIM GILRYMPLE pushed his hat back on his dark head with a gloved hand. He pulled the brim down again. His big, impassive face was pale, it sweated. He made a move of his cornered king.

"Your move," he said briefly, "Charlie."

"I suppose you know that the detectives, your brother officers, are just outside," Charlie Wintringham said sadly. "For a while I was afraid I might have lost them. But one of them assured me, when I stopped and spoke to him, that they were always there. At any moment—My white queen takes your last black rook. I moved the white queen, Gil. Don't try to shift it over while I'm not looking, because this time I'm looking. Check with the white queen, Gil. And checkmate. . . ."

The little radio was still playing. At the chessboard the two of them with their quiet voices like the sound of rain with a hushed thunder and a hidden lightning in it, like tears and weeping at the grave. With their quiet moves on the board of the wooden pieces. The sad, pale man, the lunatic from the asylum, Charlie. The big, strong, darkly good looking man with his impassive face, his rare quiet smile, whom she had met on that night of bewilderment and terror.

Like a paralyzed bird. From the beginning she had known it. From the beginning. Only the one end to the nightmare. Death in this cavelike place.

"We interrupt out musical broadcast for a special bulletin from the New York city police! Homicide Detectives Blair and Solomon, assigned to guard and follow the lunatic Charles Wintringham, who was released from the asylum in police custody under court order to locate the

hideout of the maniac killer of Mrs. Ordway in Brooklyn three weeks ago, of Mrs. Fanya Durik in the Bronx last night, and of other women, have reported that—"

"Stop that God damned thing!" snarled Tim Gilrymple.

He was on his feet. He had smashed his gloved fist down on the satinwood inlay game-table with its delicate legs, sending the chessmen hurtling, flying. Splitting the board. With his hip and shoulder hurling the small sad man crouched on the couch arm over backwards to the floor. He had picked up the chair he had been sitting on. With distorted face he hurled it.

"Don't, Tim!" she got her voice and screamed.

The crashing chair knocked the little radio from the table. It went over with the table and chair to the floor, its voice faded to a whimper and a whisper. Tim Gilrymple had out his gun.

"Don't, Tim!"

There was a great brass hammering on the chained and bolted door.

Tim Gilrymple wheeled to face it, with his lips drawn back, guns bare.

"Hello, Bill Blair! How are you, Bill?" Tim Gilrymple said.

And he fired his gun twice through the thick panels of the door.

He wheeled, gun muzzle sweeping, the echoes thundering and shrieking, his eyes dark red, towards the black, bare square of window in the rear. Out there a faint clattering, the oversetting of a board amidst the cluttered junk and boxes of the backyard.

"Hello, old Solomon!" he said. "How are you, Solomon?"

He fired his gun four times out through the open square of darkness, the shattering upper pane, the splintering wood frame, into the night.

"How are you? How are you, one and all, pals?" Tim Gilrymple said with laughter.

He sprang onto the couch with a great bound, stepping swiftly up on its back, with his face distorted, mouth open and laughing, like a laughing loon.

"I had my own airplane all the time, you fools," he said. "Did you think you'd ever catch me?"

"Don't, Tim!" she heard her own voice scream.

"Give it the gun!" he shouted.

The gun muzzle in his mouth was muffled, and he fell back.

On the floor beneath the overset table the radio whispered, "has been lost . . ." But Tim Gilrymple hadn't stayed in George Higgins' office to hear it, in his haste to head off Charlie. He would never hear it now.

Charlie Wintringham crouched beneath the couch arm, amidst the scattered chessmen of the game that had been finished.

"*Kamikaze!*" he sobbed. "*Oh, kamikaze! Brenda!*"

She was on her feet. The paralysis had gone from her. Someone had knocked. The nightmare was over. Though not yet all awake. She went stumbling blindly towards the door. She unchained and unbolted it, and pulled it open.

Crouched outside, back in the corner against the wall where not more than a quarter of an hour ago she had set down her sack of groceries so hurriedly while she sought with frantic fingers for her key, with Charlie coming, there was the little deaf, half-blind old landlady, holding up a shaking hand with a spot of blood on its back.

"Mrs. Gill?" the old lady screamed, with one hand at her ear. "I thought I'd just tap and see if you was home! About the rent! It's not due till next Monday, but I thought if you had it I could use— A splinter came jumping out of the door and scratched me! Two splinters! Oh, mercy me! What has happened? I can't hear you! But I see blood!"

(Continued on page 127)

SEE NO MURDER

By William Campbell Gault



*Wolf pack the paper
had called them. . . .*

*You can lead a speed-crazy kid to the hot seat, Pete knew
—but found that you can't make him die!*

AT BREAKFAST, there was the story again, in the papers. I looked over at my brother, and saw his eyes on me. Big, brown eyes, Manuel's got, and a quick smile, and his brain is quick, too.

"Where were you last night, Manny?" I said.

"Out. Riding the heap around."

The heap is a '36 V8 with a cut-down solid top and two pots. With a Turbo

head and Johannsen ignition. Too much car for any punk, but he'd built it. It had cost him many a skinned knuckle, and I couldn't say much about that.

"Around Pico, were you riding?" I asked him.

"Some. What's bothering you, Pete?"

"Kids bother me," I said. "Kids that got a grudge on the world. Kids that ride hot rods around, looking for trouble. In Pico, last night, seven of them beat up a

guy; beat up one guy. They held his wife, while she watched. His sister had her baby with her and she ran away, but she fell in running away, and the baby's condition is critical. The man has a broken jaw and he lost three teeth and his back has been cut in seven places. It's all here in the paper, Manny."

"So? You don't have to read it, do you? You could read the sport page. Who's asking you to read it?"

"The kids were dark with brown eyes. Mexican kids, maybe."

"Maybe they're mad at the world, Pete. Maybe they figure they're not getting the break the *gringos* get."

"And that's the way to get a break, beating up strangers with tire irons?"

"I don't know, Pete. What's it to me?"

"I don't know. But this I know. If I thought you were one of them, I'd kill you where you sit."

"Would you? Who's mad now, Pete? What kind of talk is that?"

Mama had gone next door, to Sanchez's to borrow some eggs. Now she said, "That's what I'd like to know. What kind of talk is that, Peter Montello? Why don't you lay off Manuel? He's a good boy."

"He'd better stay a good boy," I said. "Where does he get his spending money?"

"There's ways of making a buck," Manny said. "I don't have to punch a time clock to make a buck."

"You had a black eye last week. Get that making a buck?"

"Maybe."

Mama said, "Peter, it's time for work. Never mind about it, Peter."

"Who's the man around here?" I asked her. "Me or him?"

"What does it mater who's the man?" Mama answered. "I'm the boss. Here's your lunch, Peter."

I stood up and picked up my lunch. I looked at my brother. "You remember what I said."

"Which part?"

"And don't get flip." I got out before he gave me an answer to that.

Ah, he's all right. What kind of a break did he get, Papa dying when he was in seventh grade? High school, Manny had, but how could I send him farther, wrestling freight for Arnold's Cartage? He's a bright kid, and should have gone to college.

But hot rods. Hot rod hoodlums now, running around like maniacs, insulting people, beating them. Wolf packs, some of the papers called them, and the sheriff was adding more deputies.

It was a hot, heavy day and I wore a pair of gloves to rags. Handling sole leather, and it cuts you all to hell.

Gina was sitting on her front porch when I went by on the way home, and I came up. She gave me a glass of lemonade.

"When we're married," she said, "I'll have a glass of it ready for you every night when you come home from work. I'll have a pitcher of it."

"When we're married—that's good," I said.

Her eyes are too soft for this world. She bruises too easy. "Why do you talk like that?" she asked me.

"When are we going to get married? What's wrong with a fact? What have you got against a fact?"

"What have you got against the world lately? Grouchy, grouchy, grouchy all the time. Tell me why should I love a grouch?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't know."

"Oh, but I do, Peter," she said, and her soft hand stroked my cheek. "Oh, we won't fight. You've had a bad day."

"And Manny," I said.

"Now what?"

"These hoodlums, these hot rod hoodlums. Manny's got a hot rod."

"So?"

"And he had a black eye the other day."

She shook her head and looked at me with the soft eyes, like Manny's. "You're always hunting trouble, like those hoodlums. You don't know Manny's one, but you've got to think he is. Why do you always want to think bad?"

"I don't know. He's so—smart."

"You should be proud he is, not resentful. He's never given you any trouble."

Her brother Christy came up on the porch and poured himself a glass of lemonade. "Hi, Pete, how's the feet?"

Short and broad and perfect teeth. Was a fullback at Fullerton High, but no college made an offer.

I asked him, "Were you with Manny last night?"

"That's a good question," he said. "I forgot. Ask Manny."

I reached over to grab him by the shirt, but Gina was quicker, and between us. "Peter, for heaven's sakes!" she said. "You're like a wild man."

Christy was looking at me, and his eyes were shiny and his mouth working. Both his fists were clenched.

I could have crushed him with one hand. I went past them and down the steps. I went home, and got in the shower Manny had put in the back yard.

Lots of things around here Manny had fixed up. He was handy with tools. And with tire irons?

Manuel. Manuel, my baby brother. When he was three, I was twelve, and watching him all the time, because I wanted to. Smart, always smart and quick and smiling.

About eight, Gina came over. She said, "You forgot your lunch bucket." She had it in her hand.

"I'm sorry, Gina," I said. "I feel better now."

"I thought you would. Let's go to the park. There's a concert tonight."

We sat on the grass, where it's free. Ortiz had a big voice, and you could sit

in Palos Verdes and hear him. A poor man's singer, he must be; you can hear him in the cheap seats. What a voice, what a man.

I held Gina's hand and forgot about her brother. I almost forgot about Manny. Where had he been at suppertime?

Next morning, there were no new troubles in the paper. But the sheriff said there was a possibility the increase in housebreaking might be tied up with these hoodlum gangs. The city police were inclined to agree.

Manny was reading the sport page.

"Why weren't you here for supper?" I asked him.

"Wasn't hungry."

"Look at me when I talk to you."

He put the paper down.

"Did you call Ma that you wouldn't be here for supper?"

He nodded. "She knew about it."

She came from the kitchen with more pancakes. "Now what?"

"Nothing."

"Punching the clock, that's what's the matter with him," Manny said. "If you don't like it, why don't you quit, Pete?"

"And how would you two eat, then?"

"We'd find a way. We don't want to be a burden, Pete." He was grinning at me, that smart grin.

"Be quiet, both of you," Mama said. "I don't want another word out of you two this morning."

Another hot day. Loading refrigerators. The guys you get to work with these days, you might as well be alone. At noon, I sat near the north door, in the shade, with my lunch and the paper.

The voice was Shultz's. Big, round guy with a round head. Thinks he's the original Atlas.

"It's these damned Spanish-Americans, they like to be called. Most of these punks got Mex names, you notice? Manuel, or Leon, or—"

"Or Shultz," I called over.

"That's one of them," he told his buddies. "If I had my way—"

I was up and walking over there now. "What would you do, cabbage-head?" I asked him quietly.

"I'd shoot every one of those punks," he told me. "Beating up innocent people, scaring women into hysterics."

"You've got a big mouth, Shultz," I told him. "If you worked like you talked, we'd all be laid off."

He stood up, his face red. He rubbed his big hands on his cotton pants, looking me over. "Fight?" he said. "You want to fight, Mex?"

I nodded, and he came in.

He came in with a right hand I should have ducked, but didn't. It hit next to the ear and put me down. I saw his foot coming for my jaw as I scrambled on the concrete, and I twisted clear of it.

I was on my feet when he closed again. I put a fine left deep into his belly, and heard him grunt. His head crashed my mouth, and the blood spurted.

I caught him on the nose with a wild left, and he paused for maybe a second. My right caught his left eye.

He started one from the floor, and I beat him to it. It was a button shot, and I hit him twice more while he was falling.

His buddies were still sitting there. One of them said, "Don't get us wrong, Pete. We didn't ask him to sit with us. Sit down, Pete."

"It's cooler over here," I said.

It had been all right while it lasted, but it didn't do any good now. My hands trembled and I couldn't eat my lunch, and I was sick of myself. Hating wasn't any good; fighting wasn't any good. Why was I like this?

Gina was on the porch again. Mrs. Sanchez was there too, but not Christy.

Gina looked at my swollen lip, and her big eyes asked questions.

"Got caught by a packing case," I said. "Lucky it didn't tear my head off."

Mrs. Sanchez rocked in her rocker, saying nothing.

"Peter, poor Peter," Gina said.

"I'm all right," I said. "I'm no poorer than the rest in this block."

Mrs. Sanchez sighed, and said nothing. "It must be hot in that warehouse," Gina said. "Should I make some lemonade?"

"Not today, not with this lip," I said. "I'll see you later."

"Tonight?"

"Sure. I suppose."

What was there in it? I could sit on her porch the rest of my life. Five years I'd been going with her and not a dime nearer to the priest. What was there in it? Pa hadn't lost anything and Manny wasn't good for anything. I had Mama to take care of.

Manny was home for supper that evening. We didn't have any words for each other.

"Some home," Mama said. "Brothers not talking to each other."

Manny grinned. "He'll grow up some day, Ma. He was always the baby."

I looked at him and said nothing.

"Forget to duck?" he asked me.

Mama said, "It was a packing case. Peter is no street brawler, Manuel."

"Oh," Manny said, that smart way.

I asked him, "Don't you believe it?"

"Sure. If you say it. You wouldn't lie, Pete."

Red, things got, and I could feel his steady brown eyes on me. But I remembered Shultz, and how I'd felt after that.

"And if I did fight," I said, "I wouldn't use a tire iron. And I wouldn't need a gang."

Manny said quietly, "What the hell do I care what you'd do? You think you're some kind of an example?"

His eyes were burning; I'd never seen him this way before. He was breathing heavy; you could see his chest going in and out.

"Manuel—" Mama said warningly.

"Well, tell him to lay off of me, then! Picking, picking, picking all the time! I—" He got up and went out of the dining room.

The front door slammed.

Mama was shaking her head. "Peter, Peter, Peter—what is it? He's just a boy."

"He's old enough to work. I was working at his age."

She looked at the tablecloth. She was crying.

"Ma," I said, "I'm—oh, I don't know what I am. I'm sorry, Ma."

She nodded. "I know, I know—Peter, it's not good to hate. It's not good, being suspicious. Is it because of Gina? Because you've waited so long? You think I've been happy about that? Peter—"

"What's the good of talking?" I asked her. "It's a rat race, Ma." I got up, too, and went out.

It was cooler now. I could see Gina, in her kitchen, helping her mother with the dishes. I went over to Fourteenth Street, to Barney's.

I only had two bucks on me, but my credit was good. I drank a lot of whiskey, and it didn't do any good at all. I wasn't happy now, or mad—just sour, dead, empty.

The lights were out at Sanchez'. There was a light on in our house, though, and a prowler car in front. I hurried up the walk.

There was a cop there. Ma was sitting in the big chair, and crying. Manny was sitting on the davenport, looking mad.

The cop had a book in his hand, a bank book. He turned as I came in. He sniffed, and looked at me suspiciously.

"What's the matter?" I said. Sick, I was now, and mad.

"You the brother?"

"That's right. What's the matter?"

"Found this little book in a home that

was robbed tonight. It's a bankbook showing a total deposit of eleven hundred dollars, made out to your brother."

"Eleven hundred dollars?" I stared at Manny. "You—"

"It's mine, but I lost it, Pete. I lost it over two weeks ago."

"Eleven hundred dollars," I said, and took a step his way.

"Peter—" Mama said. Her voice was deep and she glared at me. "This is the time, Peter. Now, I'll know if you're a brother."

Manuel, Manuel . . . I fought the whiskey and the hate in me. What a baby he'd been. What a smart, quick, smiling baby. I took a deep breath and faced away from him. I faced the cop.

"He says he lost it. Two weeks ago, he says."

"And reported the loss?"

"The very next day," Manny said. "You could check that at the bank. You want to see the new one they gave me?"

The cop shook his head. "You've got a '36 Ford, a convertible with a cut-down, solid top?"

"Every other rod in town's a '36 with solid top. That's the best model to cut down."

"Maybe. I think you ought to come down anyway. Just a few questions, you know, like where you were tonight."

Well, a test. I turned around and said, "I'll go along, Manny. Don't let him scare you."

"I'm not scared, I'm mad," Manny said. "I'm so mad I'm not scared to admit where I was tonight, though you won't like it, Pete. I was at Gilmore Stadium, driving the Art Willis Special. I won the feature in it. There must have been a couple thousand watching me."

"You, in a race car?" I said. "Manny, baby, you're just a—"

"Pete, I won. I win a lot of races. You should read the sport pages, Pete, not the

(Continued on page 128)

STRANGE TRAILS

WILL-O'-THE-WISP *Willie Tascott*

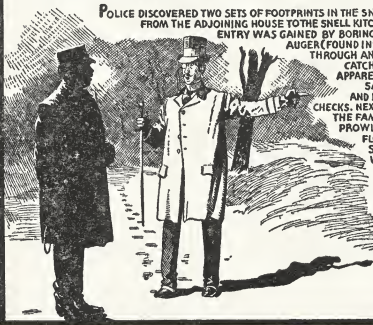
AMOS J. SNELL, MILLIONAIRE CHICAGO REAL ESTATE MAN, HAD AN ABIDING TERROR OF BURGLARS, WHICH HE PARTIALLY ALLAYED BY SLEEPING WITH A PISTOL UNDER HIS PILLOW.

ON THE NIGHT OF FEB. 7, 1888, HE RETIRED AS USUAL TO HIS SECOND FLOOR BEDROOM IN THE SNELL MANSION NEAR FASHIONABLE ASHLAND BLVD. AROUND 2 A.M., THE SERVANTS ON THE THIRD FLOOR HEARD SHOTS. MR. SNELL'S VOICE ROARED, "GET OUT OF HERE!" THERE WERE MORE SHOTS, THEN SILENCE.



AT DAWN THE COACHMAN FOUND THE MASTER LYING IN THE HALL, SHOT THROUGH HEAD AND HEART. HIS PET ABOMINATION--BURGLARS--HAD CAUGHT UP WITH HIM AT LAST.

POLICE DISCOVERED TWO SETS OF FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW LEADING FROM THE ADJOINING HOUSE TO THE SNELL KITCHEN DOOR, WHERE ENTRY WAS GAINED BY BORING A HOLE WITH AN AUGER (FOUND INSIDE), REACHING THROUGH AND RELEASING THE CATCH. THE INTRUDERS APPARENTLY FORCED THE SAFE IN THE CELLAR AND EXTRACTED SOME CHECKS. NEXT THEY COLLECTED THE FAMILY SILVER, THEN PROWLED TO THE SECOND FLOOR, AWAKENING SNELL. TWO GUNS WERE USED IN HIS MURDER--A .44 AND A .38.



THE COP ON THE BEAT REPORTED THAT SHORTLY AFTER 2 A.M. A YOUNG DUDE IN A HIGH SILK HAT STOPPED HIM AND ASKED IF HE'D HEARD SHOTS.

37-145

... to MURDER

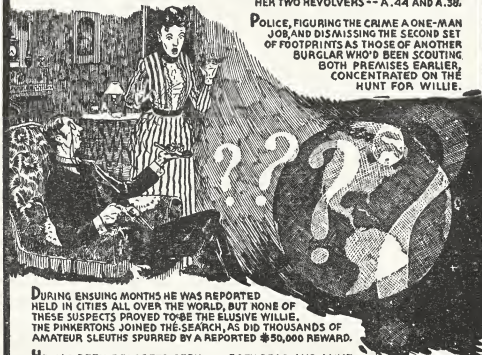
by
LEE

HARDWARE STORES WERE CANVASSED AND THE AUGER WAS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFIED AS ONE SOLD TO WILLIE TASCOTT, NE'ER-DO-WELL SON OF A WEALTHY MANUFACTURER. EVERYBODY KNEW WILLIE. HE WAS 22, A DANDY, ADDICTED TO HIGH SILK HATS -- AND CATCHING HIM LOOKED LIKE DUCK SOUP.



HALF-BURNED REMAINS OF THE STOLEN CHECKS TURNED UP IN HIS FURNISHED ROOM, AS DID LOOT FROM OTHER RECENT BURGLARIES, AND A GIRLFRIEND SAID HE'D SHOWN HER TWO REVOLVERS -- A .44 AND A .38.

POLICE, FIGURING THE CRIME A ONE-MAN JOB, AND DISMISSING THE SECOND SET OF FOOTPRINTS AS THOSE OF ANOTHER BURGLAR WHO'D BEEN SCOUTING BOTH PREMISES EARLIER, CONCENTRATED ON THE HUNT FOR WILLIE.



DURING ENSUING MONTHS HE WAS REPORTED HELD IN CITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD, BUT NONE OF THESE SUSPECTS PROVED TO BE THE ELUSIVE WILLIE. THE PINKERTONS JOINED THE SEARCH, AS DID THOUSANDS OF AMATEUR SLEUTHS SPURRED BY A REPORTED \$50,000 REWARD.

HE HAS BEEN REPORTED SEEN -- BOTH DEAD AND ALIVE -- IN VARIOUS PLACES AND AT VARIOUS TIMES THROUGH THE YEARS, BUT TO THIS DAY WILL-O'-THE-WISP WILLIE TASCOTT HAS NEVER BEEN FOUND.

*Dead or alive, she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen and
she left McQuarrie something to remember her by—*

A FRAME TO FRY IN

*He dodged behind the
chair and sent two shots
my way. . . .*



A novel by W. Lee Herrington

CHAPTER ONE

Run for Your Life!

JACK SCOTT'S bodyguard, Webster, came over to my table about three minutes before the *rurales* raided the joint. Webster made a U-turn on his left heel, crooked his finger at me and I barely heard his words.

"Jack Scott has got something for you in the office."

It burned me, his finger tagging me like I was one of the cheap help. I sat there a few seconds, killing my drink.

To hell with the Green Hills management. My bar bill was paid; it wasn't Christmas, and whatever the joint's owner had for me could wait.

The Green Hills was a smooth-bore, plushy joint tucked back in the valley a half mile off U. S. 71, and it met all comers—the small-timers with a buck bill to



snipe with, and the diehards who wanted to drop a roll of dough the easy way—in comfort.

I wasn't there for the play. I quit gambling when I was thirteen, the night I lost my shirt and my sack of scrajies and doojies to the East Side marble champ who had dropped in on me, incognito.

My business was to find out why one of the Green Hills crap dealers had grown tired of paying the bills from a downtown department store, covering the coverings on the crap dealer's latest blonde. The collection agency I was skip-tracing for would squall if I put another beer on the chit, so I watched Web Webster disappear behind one of the potted palms. Then I got up and followed.

Jack Scott, the owner of the casino, gave me the full handshake, like I was a cut-price coffee salesman. I could hear his buildup, but I was looking at the back of the woman across the big office.

What little collar there was on her black slipper satin jacket was turned up. She held a white lace handkerchief over her mouth and nose. She didn't need to worry; I hadn't seen her before, but I would have bet my wad she wasn't Jack Scott's mother.

Scott gave me back my hand, but held onto my arm. "Vince McQuarrie," he said fervently. "You're just the boy I need. Glad I saw you out front." He turned my arm loose, raked his fingers through his curly hair and charmed me with his big brown eyes. "I just got a tip a few minutes ago that the county boys are going to give us the business any minute now. I have a—" He pulled me toward a side door, tightened up his smile, found the word he wanted—"a client who is particularly anxious not to be caught in a raid in my place. Can you get her back to town without letting her in for any publicity?"

I said, "What can I lose? I was just

leaving anyway. I might as well take your sister for a ride."

Jack Scott patted my shoulder. "Thanks, McQuarrie. Next time you're in my neighborhood, you can write your own ticket."

I had another quick look at the woman before she turned. Then she was coming my way fast, brushing on by.

She was already running, heading for the car I had pointed out, when the six cars pulled up in front of the Green Hills.

Four more constable cars were sealing off the side parking lot exit when I got my old bucket of bolts into gear. A throttle jockey with a hot rod complex skidded his Frazer Manhattan around in a tight skid, trying to put the hem on me.

I went up to second, stuck my foot on the accelerator and aimed my job at the Frazer. At the last second, its driver cut hard right and I went on through. I didn't blame him for turning chicken. My jalopy was paid for.

I didn't bother to look back or listen. I've been in and on raids before and they never vary. Jack Scott would put up bond for sixty or seventy John Does and Myrtle Roes and the bonds would be forfeited tomorrow morning at nine o'clock in some jack-leg justice of the peace court. That would be that. It was expected.

The voice brought me around. "That was smooth." She peeled back her handkerchief then, looked up and let me see her face.

Take seven girls who look like Gene Tierney. Roll them into one and drench lightly with a flowery perfume. Let the headlights from other cars shine through your windshield into her eyes while she leans your way. Hide half her face behind the collar of a black jacket and you don't hesitate when she says, "Couldn't we have a nice quiet drink somewhere, Mr. McQuarrie?"

WE HAD our quiet drink in a chicken dinner ranch four miles nearer town. Following the waiter to a corner table, she moved like a black panther; black jacket, black suede skirt.

She had her white gloves off and in her purse when she looked at the menu. That was when I noticed the square-cut emerald on her right hand. The puddle of green fire wasn't much bigger than a lima bean.

It wasn't any of my business, so I asked, "You go to Jack Scott's gambling hell frequently?"

She raised her eyes, made movements with her head that caused the waiter to get the bend out of his knees and come back our way. Her eyes came on around to mine.

"Frequently."

"Even nice girls get caught in gambling raids."

"Thanks for the nice-girls crack and for pulling the women and children first act back there."

I leaned forward a little, letting the green fire burn into my eyes. I didn't look up at the waiter when I ordered scotch for both of us. She didn't change the order.

"Emeralds are a little out of fashion for an otherwise fashionably dressed woman," I said.

"I've been told it goes well with my eyes."

I nodded. For me, there's never been any point in looking into a cool well I can't drink from, so I decided one of her eyes was a shade greener than the other and let it go at that.

She said, "You haven't asked me prying questions like my name, am I married and that sort of thing."

"Jack Scott asked me to drop you off in town. That's a ten minute drive from here. Tomorrow morning you'll wake up, have trouble remembering my name,

what I look like, if you think of it at all. Let me wonder about you and I'll be a night ahead of you. Tell me, and I'll always wonder."

"About what?"

"About things like who you benched when Jack Scott came along. In ten minutes, I'd be jealous of the three before that."

She laughed easily. "Am I as transparent as all that? You have me down in your book as Jack Scott's girl?"

I shrugged. That sort of talk just goes around in circles. We got express delivery on the drinks. She drank hers like a thirsty fawn, pushed the glass aside and reached for her gloves. Then she slowed down.

"Are you a friend of Jack Scott?"

I shook my head. "I used to be a cop before the war. Vice squad for a while, homicide and the rest. I helped raid Jack Scott's spots when he was in town. When I got back he had moved to the country, where he only worries about the county cousins when he gets behind with their check. I picked up an allergy somewhere to uniforms, so I hired out to a collection agency as a skip tracer. That brings us up to now."

"We can always dance," she said and smiled.

We danced to somebody else's nickel and after that I was putting it in the juke box two bits at a time. It was when we were in a corner, not making any attempt to get out, that she made little slits of her eyes and said,

"You're not clumsy, you're not boring and you don't try for a pass the minute you get the ball. I think you're in my league."

"I might put up my hand to stop a line drive," I admitted, "but I'm a little old to be shagging fly balls. Say I could drown in your eyes or go to the gas chamber if it meant dying with your perfume in my nostrils. That's as poetic

as I'll ever get. On the practical side, it's been nice knowing you and the smart thing would be to take you home."

I loosened my hand around her waist. She let her hand slide out of mine and said, "I think I'll like a practical man for a change."

She was in the car, with me holding the door open, leaning close to her, when the blinding flash of light hit my eyes. It took me three seconds to analyze the play, then I was around the car, tackling the short, heavy-set man with the press size Speed Graphic. He spilled out the fired flash bulb and his oily eyes had fear in them when he recognized me.

"Hello, Art," I said and made a pass at his film holder as he slid it into a coat pocket.

Art Haggis said, "Why, dammit, McQuarrie, now let me get this straight. I thought you were Jack Scott. Where did she make the switch?"

I got the double film holder, pulled the slides and held it up to the dim light of the car's headlights, and handed the holder back to Haggis. Then I pulled him around the car and let the girl see him. She had gone into her cover-up act again, handkerchief over her face, coat collar up.

I said, "Meet Art Haggis. He's a ninth-rate private dick from back in town who makes a living getting divorce evidence. He's pretty good at the racket, from what I hear, although some of his evidence he gets the hard way. I'm not worried about a wife. You want to take it from there?"

She shook her head and kept the handkerchief over the lower part of her face. I took my hands off Art Haggis and pushed him away.

It gave him heart and he said, "I'll remember this, McQuarrie, in case it's ever the other way around."

"You do that," I invited. "But don't get tough about it now. You've invaded

my privacy and that puts you on the little end of the stick. Just don't follow it up. Catch?"

Art Haggis nodded and walked quickly toward a parked car. I got into my car with the girl. The perfume was the same. Everything was the same as before, and yet it wasn't. There was a curtain between us. Probably it was the newness of the tears.

She leaned toward me, used my shoulder and cried. Not with all the stops out, nor hysterical. Just a frustrated cry. Then she stiffened and put the white lace away and used the clean handkerchief with my initials on it.

I reached for the gear shift. Her hand came down over mine, warm and soft. "I always talk better over a drink," she said, "and I've got to talk to someone."

THE meeting with Art Haggis had put out the fire the scotch had built and I was all through till the next time, but I watched her drink scotch. This time we were in a booth and it was dark and comfortable.

"Don't make up your mind about me, McQuarrie," she said. "I was young and greedy and he was older, and had money. He offered me everything I had ever wanted. A girl would be a fool not to marry a man like that." The green fire in the emerald burned in my eyes when she moved her hand. "It wasn't anything sordid, like you think, McQuarrie."

"Of course not."

"We were married properly. But I'm young, and he was old. Much too old for me." Her mouth was cynical and somehow she didn't look too much like Gene Tierney anymore.

She said, "You've probably heard the story before."

"The last time," I said, "was in a back alley tenement over on Front Street. She was nineteen. She had just caved

her husband's head in with a meat cleaver. She said she wanted freedom but it turned out that she had killed him for seven hundred dollars insurance. Her old man was my age. Thirty-four."

But Louis Harmon was fifty-seven, quiet, wealthy and white-haired. Isobel Harmon was twenty-three, two years younger than I had guessed her to be. Louis Harmon never questioned the bills for her high octane tastes, and took the ink out of his pen only when it came to gambling losses.

Jack Scott had looked at some IOU's, then at her eyes, and torn up the chits.

"Children don't wear out their toys, McQuarrie," she was saying. "They get broken up somehow. I've always broken most of mine, sooner or later."

I'm the one who was old enough to know better. It was like the suddenness of dropping a man through the trap—the knot coming up against his ear and that's the end. With us, it was different.

Isobel Harmon was easy to please. She even got a bang out of the trips to the zoo; the rapid hours sitting on the grass in the park, looking at nothing but a slow, stray cloud.

The agency I worked for wasn't so easy to please. They had sordid ideas of a practical life where the help did some work, brought in some money. So I quit.

Maybe it called me back to reality, or maybe it was the knot beginning to tighten under my ear just before the real drop.

Because the same afternoon, the letter came.

CHAPTER TWO

Call on Murder

ANYONE can get knocked off his rocker for a week. The trick is getting back on. Some do it the easy way, like Jack Scott—a polite kiss-off and a smile for a goodbye. Some get

up and walk away and forget about it.

I was running. I went to the mirror and looked for grey hairs and didn't find any.

My old two-suiter lay on the bed, packed. My eight hundred dollar savings account was checked out and in my pocket. I even knew of an agency in Kansas City that needed a man of my questionable talents and few simple skills.

I didn't answer the knocks on the door until they stopped. Isobel would have knocked for more than the half minute. When I opened up, all I saw was the disappearing back of a messenger boy. The envelope lay under the door, just touching the carpet.

The writing inside was clear, as if the writer had been a Spencerian student a long time ago; longhand as precise and cold as the words:

My Dear Sir:

Patience, too long endured, may come in time to stamp its holder as practising a vice instead of a virtue. I have been so patient with Isobel for so long a time that, believe me, sir, it is difficult to realize at this late date that I have taken steps to correct my perspective and refurbish my sense of values.

If you will be good enough to call on me at the Blaisdell Apartments promptly at 8 o'clock tonight, I feel very confident that I shall be able to convince you that you have shared my faulty judgment of my wife, Isobel.

May I expect you then, this evening?

The signature, Louis Harmon, would have been good for any amount in any bank. I went over to the two-suiter and unhooked the blue gabardine and laid it on the bed. Between then and seven-thirty, I gave it a lot of thought. The smart thing to do was walk away from Isobel Harmon in a hurry. But after all, I wasn't running from Harmon. I owed him something.

The small brass plate to the left of the door said the Blaisdell was a 'Plural residence, tenant owned and managed'. What it didn't add was the Blaisdell was an X-

shaped building in the choice apartment neighborhood, with its garages in the basement. The janitors probably poked up the fire on cold mornings dressed in a dinner jacket.

"Your name please?" The clerk was a middle-aged woman with a face full of dead illusions under a hairdo that had just been invented.

"My name wouldn't mean anything to you," I said. "I'm to see Mr. Louis Harmon at eight."

Her wrist watch ticked daintily and showed I had a little over a minute to go. She looked at the crisp sheet of typed appointments. "I haven't been informed Mr. Harmon is expecting anyone. Who shall I say is calling?"

"It's a delicate matter," I said. "He probably didn't want to worry you. Just buzz him and say the eight o'clock man decided to show up. He'll understand."

She used her hands on the instruments, but she was flying blind. Her eyes were looking past my shoulder. It brought my head around.

Isobel Harmon stood with one hand upraised, not quite touching my arm. She had a half smile held loosely between her perfect teeth and her red lips, poised like an eager child who expects something to happen just around the next minute.

"Hello, Vince," she said it the way she'd always said it and her hand dropped possessively across my arm the way it had always dropped before.

I said, "Good evening, Mrs. Harmon," or the benefit of the frank interest the middle-aged clerk was taking in us. I followed Isobel across the deep carpet, letting her edge me into the secluded hallway. My insides felt rough and tight, like a sharp rock lying on a faceless beach.

Our hands touched and the static from the carpet made a tiny brittle sound. An ominous, sharp sound, warning me to make it the last break, clean and sharp;

a static sound that tried to warn me like an S.O.S. *Last time around, McQuarrie. All ashore that's going ashore.*

She jumped a little, feeling the quick, sharp tingle in our fingers. She jumped my way. Her arms locked behind my neck and her mouth slashed at mine. I don't know how long we stood that way. How long is the last drop?

She broke first, her breath warm on my face, mouth turned so that her words purred into my ear.

"I called you a lot of times today, Vince. You didn't answer."

"No," I said, "I didn't answer."

"What happened to us, Vince? We had fun together?"

"Sure, that was it, fun. All in fun."

"I've played you wrong, somewhere," she said hoarsely, "and now you're getting away from me. What went wrong, Vince?"

"I remember what you told me about your toys," I said. "I'm getting out before you pull my wheels off." I slapped it at her hard and savagely. "Let it go, Isobel. Take it for what it was. Fun. A few laughs. It's all done and finished."

"But you came," she said smugly, and pushed away a little.

"I came because your husband asked me to come. I owe him that much—if I'm lucky, he'll merely kick my face in and I'll let him and that will wind it up."

Her lips turned up a little—part smile, part sneer and neither half pretty. Just a little movement of the face, wiping me off her lips forever. It didn't add to my ego, watching it die there in the hallway, hearing her say, "I wouldn't worry too much about Louis Harmon suing me for a divorce. But you can go now, if you want to. If he's waiting for you."

It was easier then, walking away from her, hearing the clerk say, "Four, southwest. Mr. Harmon's private elevator is the one on the left."

I thanked her and pushed the button

on the automatic. It came up promptly from the basement. I got in, looking at my watch. I was still fairly prompt. Six minutes after eight.

Time had always gone screwy when Isobel put her arms around my neck. One minute late for every day I had known her.

I punched the single button that took the car to the fourth floor. I sorted the memories of Isobel and killed them one by one. When I pulled the elevator door back, slid the paneling open, the memories stopped for all time.

Death isn't moved by memories.

LOUIS HARMON had been shot twice in the chest. His eyes were glazing and like his mouth, open. I let the panel door slide shut and its click jolted me. It had the sound of a jail door I remembered from someplace. It brought out the cold sweat on me and my eyes did a fast inventory of the place.

I was in a foyer, about twelve by twelve feet. Three of the walls were made of glass blocks, the fourth wall tinted in a water-green pastel. There were peculiarly-shaped plants in odder-shaped pots. The lighting was indirect and made the whole thing seem like a waterless aquarium with Louis Harmon dead on the bottom. His blood made a bright splash against the black and white tiles of the floor.

The gun was a 9 millimeter Belgian automatic. I began to get the shakes and my perceptions sharpened. A small table held a tall vase of Chinchérinchee blossoms; the blooms they fly over from Africa for joints like the Blaisdell. Just under the table lay a white handkerchief. I looked at it, saw my initials in the corner. She had me tight. That meant there wouldn't be any prints on the Belgian gun.

I got a little starch in my knees now and had a fast look at Louis Harmon. He had been a tall man, well built and

not too much marked by his sixty years. His white hair had thinned and the grey in his moustache looked greyer against his dead skin. Oh, but she had me framed tight!

Harmon's feet were in the opening of an arch that led to a living room, and the lights were on. In the far corner a console radio combination clicked, dropped a fresh recording on and the needle came down. Bass notes oscillated with the pound of my pulse. Inside my head half my brain screamed, *Run, Killer, run!* The other sorted out whatever I'd learned as a cop. My eyes raced around the foyer, hunting the thing that had to be there if they obeyed the fire laws. I found the crack in the paint that showed me where the fire door was, set in the water-green wall.

I had the handkerchief in my pocket, on one knee, reaching for the automatic. Then I had the feeling someone had handed me a hand grenade and I'd pulled the pin and thrown it away, keeping the grenade.

It blew up in my face two seconds later. Art Haggis walked out of the elevator, holding a Banker's Special belly high. "Hello, McQuarrie," Haggis said. "I guess I've been right about you all along. I figured I was on the right track."

"Sure," I said. "We've just been on different trains. Do you sleep in the elevator shaft? You don't have the class it takes to live here."

Haggis shrugged. "I work for the old man." He edged around me, never lowering the gun, and had a time of it, getting an eyeful of his boss and watching that I didn't break. He looked toward the window, motioning with the gun. I went to the window.

"That side street, with the rise," Haggis explained. "That's where I was parked. That was the play. Harmon expected you at eight, but he didn't know how you'd take it. He wouldn't let me

stake you out inside the apartment, but we had a signal arranged. If you got tough, he was to signal me from the window. I had a pair of glasses trained on the window, but the thing went wrong. You let him have it without too much buildup. All I saw was when he went down. But it was enough."

I looked over my shoulder. "Let's start over, Art. You couldn't see the elevator from up on the hill."

"You got a point there," Haggis said easily, "but you're stuck with it. I'll show you in a minute."

Haggis herded me back to the hall phone, picked it up and got headquarters on the phone. He relayed the details, got a homicide sergeant named Talbit on the line and told Talbit he was holding me. Haggis hung up the phone and pointed a dirty finger toward the facing of the living room arch.

"I'm remembering that night a week ago when you pushed me around, and I'm not pretending I'm sorry you're jammed up tight. You've loused yourself better than if this was something I'd thought up myself. See this?"

I looked at the row of buttons set flush in the door facing.

"This is what's going to sit you in the gas chamber, McQuarrie—these buttons. The old man liked gadgets. He had a private elevator and it's regular enough in some ways. It opens at the downstairs level, you can ride it up, but from there on, Harmon kept control. This top button controls the elevator door, and holds back the lock. The middle button controls the panel door, so that even if you got through the elevator door, he could still block you out. The third button neutralizes the other two. So no one could enter this apartment without Harmon wanting them to. There only one other way to do it."

My throat was dry. I said, "What about keys?"

"That's the deal. There are two keys. I expect Talbit will find one in Harmon's pocket. Mrs. Harmon has the other. So that's the way it is. I had Harmon in my glasses. He stood here, punched a button, then I saw him go down."

"All right, let's say your killer came in through the fire door," I said.

Haggis shook his head. "You didn't come in that way. That stairway goes straight to the garage level, but it's locked on this side with a deadlock. If it's held open more than three minutes, an alarm sounds in the garage manager's office and the cops come. There's no connecting passages between this and the other wings." Haggis paused for breath and grinned at me.

"What kind of cigarettes can I bring you in the death house?"

Overconfidence has ruined a lot of guys. Up to now, I had gone along like a scared kid, not pulling back. Haggis assayed the look on my face and put his gun away.

I did the same for him. My whole body shook with the impact of my fist, jamming into his fat little jaw. He folded toward me like a wet bath towel sliding off the tub.

I made sure the fire door closed behind me. When I got to the garage ramp, a man in a white jacket was using the phone in a glass enclosed office. A car entered the ramp behind me. I moved over, used it for a cover, passed the parking tunnels and walked outside. The air was cool on my face and I was sweating.

Walking out of Louis Harmon's waterless aquarium was as simple as that. How his killer had rooked the gadgets he had devised to protect him was still a mystery to me and Art Haggis. I had escaped from the divorce racket private dick. That made me game for a pickup for murder. I had taken it on the lam and that made me fair game for a cop to stop with a bullet.

All it had bought me was a little time. For what? Just so I'd be a little older when they strapped me into the chair. I got the old car in motion, took it according to the night speed limit until I hit the edge of town.

Then I pointed it toward the county line, and hit U.S. 71. Maybe Jack Scott had a few ideas.

Jack Scott wiped a hand through his curly hair and took his feet off the desk. He filled my glass again.

"Thanks," I said. "Running from the cops dries a man out."

"How bad is it?"

"How bad is murder? Isobel's husband took a couple of nine millimeter slugs in the chest at eight o'clock. I walked right in six minutes later. Art Haggis is the lad who put the arm on me."

"For an ex-cop," Scott said severely, "you're pretty dumb about dames."

"The Police Academy didn't go into those angles," I said.

Scott said, "I should have warned you about Isobel. She's part bulldog. She's nice to pet but hard to shake. What about Haggis? Just what has he got on you?"

I gave him the rundown; the mistake Haggis had made with his camera. I said, "Then there's the letter Harmon wrote me, and the gun. I didn't have a chance to check, but the odds are it's one I kept in the glove compartment of my car. Isobel could have lifted it."

Scott stood up and paced the office floor. He stopped at a window, stared for several seconds at the road leading to the gambling casino. Then he faced the door, said, "Web!" in a loud voice. Web Webster came in, waved a hand at me.

"Web, get out the Olds." Scott snapped. Web nodded and trotted out. Scott turned back to me, his dark eyes alive, half lidded.

I said, "I'll set the Olds down some-

where and drop you a line or a Christmas card from South America."

Scott shook his head. "All those places down there have extradition treaties with the U.S." Scott reached for the phone. "I'll call the boys in Los Angeles to be on the lookout for you. They can find you a nice dark, smoggy spot. In the meantime, the trick is to get you to St. Louis, a ride on TWA to L.A., and dump your car somewhere. I'll see what I can do to muddy the issue here with the cops."

"Don't play it too fancy," I warned. "I'll make out if I can borrow Web and a car for a while."

"Name your game. I told you once to write your own ticket."

"Everything I own is back at the apartment. I'll need the clothes and the rest. Here's the play: Web drives my car, decoys the cops away if I'm staked out. Then I drive your car in, grab my junk and abandon your car somewhere."

Scott nodded. He went out to the shiny Oldsmobile with me and told Web what the play was. Web nodded, got into my car and tooled it down the back road, not using any lights.

Scott shook hands with me. "Next time," he warned, "Stick to blondes. If you make it, look me up again sometime."

CHAPTER THREE

Patsy by Gunlight

WEB WEBSTER went around the block fast the first time, then slowed the second trip. The cop car was half way up the block, its lights out, engine running. I parked the Olds two blocks up and heard the cop car whine its engine, snaking after Web Webster. He played with them a few seconds, then let my old job out. From there on in Web was on his own.

I drove on past, had a look in the alley, saw nothing suspicious and went in the

back way. I was in, shucking the blue gabardine, reaching for the clothes in the open two-suit, the old army .45 in my coat pocket, the bag snapped shut and my hand on the grip.

The scraping sound brought my eyes around, my hand on the automatic.

Sergeant Talbit said, "Don't do it, Mac. You're in too deep already." He came out of the bathroom and watched me. He didn't draw on me. I'd ridden prowl with him; been on vice raids with him, but there were years in between us since we'd met last. "You can only run so far."

I said, "I used to think like you, Mike," I laughed bitterly. "Flight is an admission of guilt. I know better now. Don't draw on me, Mike. I could always beat you with guns. I'm lamming."

He shook his gray head. "You haven't got a chance, Mac. You're breathing hard already and this is just the first lap. You want to tell me anything before we go downstairs and take a ride?"

"Don't make it sound like a traffic charge," I snapped. "I know how deep I'm in. Louis Harmon was using Art Haggis to get divorce evidence against his wife. Someone outsmarted Haggis, who was staked out, and gunned Harmon."

Mike Talbit said, "That just leaves one point. Did you think it all up yourself, or was Mrs. Harmon in with you?"

I hung on the thought for a few seconds. "The clerk at the Blaisdell talked to Harmon on the phone. That makes him alive when I got there. But Mrs. Harmon was in the lobby, and I spent five or six minutes talking to her. Harmon was dead when I got up there to his apartment."

"So you think that weeds her out. Well, remember this: If she was divorcing her husband, she would retain all her dower rights in case he later died. But in this state, if a man divorces a woman, the

act returns him to his status quo. It's as if he had never married her."

"Show me how she did it," I said stubbornly.

"Louis Harmon called me a little before seven-thirty this evening," Mike Talbit said. "He said that in case Haggis wasn't able to protect him, to drop in on you. Mrs. Harmon picked you up a week ago for a patsy. You went down hard, and stayed down, like a lovesick schoolkid. Tonight, you paid her back by knocking off her husband for her."

I said, "Well, I was a chump, coming back here, but I figured on the lad who was driving my car to pull your stake-out away so I could come in safely. Well, let's go downtown and get it over with."

Mike Talbit said, "I thought for a while I was sitting on a cold nest, but you came back." He shook his head. "Don't kid yourself, Mac, about making a break as we go downstairs. I've got a car with a driver sitting in the driveway across the street. I don't see how you missed seeing it."

"These new transmitter antennae fooled me, I guess," I said and started moving when Mike put the hand on my arm.

We went downstairs and got into the back seat of the police sedan. The young driver pulled the car around and headed it toward town. The radio was growling in an undertone and the young cop turned up the volume.

We had gone six blocks when the payoff came. The dispatcher's tired voice said, "All cars on code five, number two, cancel. Cancel code five number two. Subject in custody."

Talbot said, "That takes care of your decoy," and leaned back against the seat. "I'll see they don't give you any more than if you hadn't been a friend of mine."

It was too easy. Mike Talbit made it easier by raising his right shoulder,

reaching for his cigarettes. I put my shoulder against the back of the seat, kicked my feet against the back of the neck of the driver. He went on forward, his face mashing against the steering wheel. My own .45 slashed against Mike Talbit's wrist as he fumbled for his gun. I had them both then, the .45 against Mike, the .38 punched against the neck of the young cop. He stirred groggily.

Talbit hadn't spoken a word. He was silent as I made him get out and pull the young cop from under the wheel to make room for me. I dropped down under the wheel of the V-8 and hurried the engine. Talbit jerked back as I spun the wheels.

I had to use the siren a couple of times on the intersections and stop lights. I tossed the .38 behind the seat, laid my own .45 on the cushion by my right hand and drove. I had no plan, and it was increasingly obvious that Mike Talbit had made it easy for me to take the cop car.

Why? They had me on the air in five minutes.

"... On the cancellation of code five number two. Reinstate. Pick up and hold for Talbit, homicide, one white man about thirty-five, one-seventy, five-eleven, brown, blue. Subject is now armed. Subject escaped from Sergeant Talbit and commandeered department vehicle number one zero three. Subject is believed to be attempting to escape by way of U.S. 40. Cars one zero four, one zero five, one zero seven converge intersection Blue Ridge Road and Wheeling Avenue."

I pulled off Blue Ridge road and wound the patrol car up along Cliff Drive, the winding road that runs east. Behind me, sirens were pinching at my ears.

Run, killer, run! There's a nice high turn up ahead. Wind it up and let it fly. You've loused yourself for the last time. You've been running from something all your life, killer. There's a nice drop ahead

of a hundred feet, right on over the railing and down a hundred feet to the railroad tracks.

The tires were screaming now, shutting out other sounds. They sang a song into my ears. *Toys never wear out, they just get broken up.*

I took my .45 from the seat where it was bouncing around and put it under my belt.

May I expect you then at eight o'clock? Lights in the railroad yards below flickered dizzily as the Ford bounced along. I whipped around a wide curve. The short bend was coming closer now.

SIXTEEN feet the first second, thirty-two feet the second second . . . only a five second wait and it could be over and done. I could explain it all to Louis Harmon tonight in hell—a tenement on Front Street. A bloody axe. Seven hundred dollars insurance. A waterless aquarium and a million bucks. *He was too old for me!*

The lights were on me now, the bobbing, jumping red of a police spotlight. That must have been what woke me from the welcoming drop six hundred feet ahead. I slowed, unlatched the right hand door. Then I whipped the Ford around in a tight skid to the left. It shoved right on through the bordering bushes, squallied its tires and hung on for a few seconds.

I rolled across the seat, out the door and felt the hard ground hit my shoulders and I went limp and relaxed, pounding against the shrubbery.

The drop took more than five seconds. It seemed hours before I heard the V-8 pound against the tracks down in the yards. Then the gas tank caught and flared. It washed me clean and left me weak and wet with sweat. But I had run my last mile. I thought I had it now. Jack Scott and Isobel Harmon. If they had hatched the thing, it had started

a week ago, at the Green Hills. Maybe they were together now, toasting me.

I hit off through the shrubby-lined drive along the cliff. A police car slowed, hunting a side road down to the tracks below. My hips and shoulders had a tight, numb feeling.

The light in the valley helped me find a path and came out of the woods into a residential area. A quarter of a mile away, the lights of a gas station burned brightly.

I waited until a car pulled into the station. It had two girls in it. I walked inside, dropped a nickel into the phone and dialed.

Her voice was clear and sweet. I hesitated, half tempted to hang up. "Yes?" Isobel said again.

"Are you alone?" I muffled the words.

"Vince . . . oh, Vince!"

"Are you alone?" I snapped.

"Yes. Where are you?"

"Have they given you the works? Are you under suspicion?"

There was a pause. Then, "I have been questioned. But they are sure I don't know what happened. Vince—"

"Yes?"

"I've got to come to you, Vince."

"Grab a cab and meet me . . ." I paused, hearing another siren, and I hurried it. "Meet me at the foot of Water Street and Benedict. That's almost at the river. If I fail to show, keep on going."

"How soon?" she asked eagerly.

"You can't come too fast," I said, seeing the attendant put the gas cap back on the tank. I hung up and took it a little faster, after I had covered a half block.

ISOBEL Harmon stabbed a brassy key into the door lock as soon as the elevator door slid back.

This time the foyer looked different. Harmon's body was gone. The scent from the Chinchinchee blossoms had the place

all to itself and wasn't competing with the cheap smell of blood.

I followed Isobel into the living room. She tossed her purse aside, let her coat fall back from her shoulders.

"You'll be safe here," she said hoarsely. "I'll dress quickly, then you and I will plan some way to get out of town safely."

She wasn't gone long, but the sounds I heard were not the slithering sounds of a woman dressing; not the soft pat of a powder puff against firm flesh. The telephone dial whirled. I moved toward the bedroom door. It opened quickly and she was saying, "You can find the kitchen, Vince. Mix up a drink."

I was in the living room with two drinks when she came back, dressed in a dark suit. I took a half step, set the drinks down. My hands were on her, thumbs pressed hard against her collarbone. I wondered how long it would take Jack Scott to make the trip, to answer her call—to start me on my last go-round.

She winced under my hands, but she pushed against me. She got her arms inside my guard, her face close to mine. "Don't you see? Louis is dead and we can have the whole world, you and me."

I pushed her away and got my drink. "I ran away from home when I was a kid because my old man beat me up when he got drunk. In the army I always wanted to run. I ran away from being a cop and when I saw I was going downhill for you—I ran some more. I took it on the lam from Haggis, and then I ran from Mike Talbit." I shook my head. "I'm waiting this one out."

"What is there to wait for? Sooner or later the police will think to come back here."

"You're damn right they will," I snarled. "You came to me too easy—too quick. We came right back here where you could set me up the way you set Harmon up. The elevator signal will buzz.

One of us will punch the button that releases the door lock—"

I let her kiss me once more, then I took the .45 from under my belt and examined it.

I shoved Isobel away roughly. "Stand by the buttons," I ordered. "When he signals, push the button. Or you can run. Unless you want to watch me shoot Jack Scott to death in your fancy elevator."

She licked her lips. Her lipstick was fuzzy and her mouth shapeless. We both jumped when the buzzer sounded.

"Push the button, sweetheart," I snapped and pushed her toward the archway. "You're the executioner."

She shook her head. "I can't, Vince."

"Your husband didn't have any trouble pushing it," I snarled. "Push it! Or I'll shoot you in the stomach."

SHE widened her eyes and stared at my gun and believed me. I stood deep in the shadows of the corner, waiting. Her hand moved with tantalizing slowness, then her shoulder arched and she stabbed at the pushbutton.

The doors slid open and the single shot was loud, blasting a jet of orange fire into the foyer. Isobel took the slug right in the chest. The angle of the second shot changed and ploughed toward me. Then the meaty face of Art Haggis showed around the edge of the elevator door. It caught me flatfooted and off mental balance. My slug was tooled and named for Jack Scott, not the hard-faced little divorce dick. Then my reflexes caught and I triggered the .45 twice.

Haggis made a lunging sprawl for the protection of an upholstered chair, then sent two shots my way. The first whistled past my neck. The second ricocheted, chipping the tiles. It keyholed and rapped along my ribs and a volcano of pain blew up inside me. I hit the floor, rolled against the wall and felt along the edge of the fire door, hunting the release.

I could hear Art Haggis breathing hollowly behind the chair and I lay flat on the floor and sent two more slugs toward him. His gun didn't answer. The breathing slowed then, and I watched blood drip onto the floor. The drops seemed to bounce.

"Haggis!" I called. Off to my right, Isobel Harmon had slumped to the floor in a sitting position. "Haggis!"

He didn't answer for a full minute and his words were slow and convincing. "I'm done for, McQuarrie."

"Prove it," I snapped. "Throw out the gun."

When I heard the gun drop and show beyond the chair leg I wedged the fire door open with a book of paper matches and crawled slowly toward the chair.

"The fire door alarm goes into headquarters in about two minutes, Haggis," I said. "If you can talk your way out of this, go ahead. You're living now because you threw me off my timing. I was set for Jack Scott."

"Scott?" The surprise strengthened his voice. "Not Scott. He's been out of it since the night you took over with the woman. You were the fair-haired boy from there on in. Giving her the brush-off was a mistake, Mac."

"Show me how it was a mistake," I promised, "and I'll see if I can stop the bleeding."

"Too late for that," Haggis said. I crawled some more and slapped the gun aside and went on behind the chair and got to one knee. Haggis had taken a slug high in the chest and the other hit had creased along his jaw. One corner of his mouth twitched upward. "You had already planted the seeds in her head," Haggis said. "The night of the raid at Scott's place, when you gave her the run-down on me. I was already working for her husband."

I said, "You're a lousy liar."

"Ask her." Haggis said simply.

I looked past the arm of the chair. Isobel had her eyes closed now. I said, "It's a little late for that."

Haggis said, "Then I suppose it's even all around. Too much masterminding . . . too fancy. It was my idea to persuade Harmon to send you a letter, asking you to come here at eight o'clock. That took care of you as the patsy. Mrs. Harmon played her part all right, waylaying you in the lobby, to give me time to grab the elevator in the basement, ride it up here and hand Harmon the dose."

"You're a liar," I said again. "What about the story of you being staked out with binoculars to see what went on?"

"It made a nice story," Haggis explained. "It was working nicely until you slugged me and beat it. From then on, we didn't have the patsy to throw to the cops. So Mrs. Harmon called me the minute she got you back here."

"What about the gun," I asked, "and the handkerchief with my initials on it?"

"Mrs. Harmon. She had the handkerchief from somewhere. She knew the gun was in your car, so that part was easy."

"Mrs. Harmon was broke," I said. "You sold out Harmon, went over to his wife, framed me. On credit."

Haggis shook his head. "In my pocket," he said briefly.

I dipped a hand into his coat pocket. The green fire came into my hand and I looked at it in the dim light.

Haggis said, "That was all I got out of it. I've always wanted a rock like that. If I had it to do over again. . . ."

Art Haggis died with his mouth shut and his eyes open, the way he had lived. Behind me I heard the click of the time-switch built into the fire door. I stood up and walked across the room to Isobel.

She was sitting on the floor. The wound in her chest was a nasty one.

She whispered, "How am I doing, Vince?"

I said, "I'm not an expert—you might make it."

"Told you I always . . . break my toys." Her eyes opened. "Kiss me goodbye, Vince?"

"I'm not going anywhere," I lied, "I'll stick around." But I kissed her goodbye. She didn't know about it though. She was over the hump, now.

Nothing had been broken, just my pride. I was sitting in a chair holding onto myself when Talbit came in. I handed him the green lump of stone.

We got it all straightened out a little after midnight. I explained how Art Haggis had been hired by Isobel to blast her husband and kill a flock of birds with one rock. She would have had freedom—and money, and a fall guy for the cops. How she had come running when I called her, and how she had promptly got Art Haggis on the phone in her bedroom and warned him to come in shooting. Talbit was yawning when we finally left headquarters.

Jack Scott and Web Webster came out behind us, and waved at me and got into the Oldsmobile and drove away. Talbit said, "You didn't have a chance, Bub."

"I know it," I said.

"I mean when you hijacked the squad car. I let you, hoping you'd pull a chump stunt and lead us to the woman."

"I did," I reminded him.

"There was always the off chance that you were nuts enough about her to knock Harmon off for her. Nice looking dame, too. Reminds me of someone I've seen from somewhere."

"Someone you've seen in the movies," I suggested.

Talbit pinched his lip as if the thought worried him. I opened the door of the old hack, wondering if the engine would start once more. Talbit said, "Yeah, that must be it. The movies."

Talbit got in and rode across town with me.



Solving Cipher Secrets



Founded in 1924

Article No. 851

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5331—Quick Proof. By †Anidem. Single-letter word R will unlock phrase KZRK KZV. Next, two-letter words KF and RE will check with EFKAFE.

"KZV EFKAFE KZRK KZV NRP KF XAEU R YRJ CVRB AJ
NAKZ R CAYZKVU DRKTZ AJ RE VOGCFUVU KZVFHP," JRPJ

*TZATRYF GRGVH. JFDV JKACC NFE'K SVC AVL V KZAJI

No. 5332—Less a Letter. By Londoner. Compare short words T, GOTG, and GOR; also B and BG. With these for a starter, HOTAA and HURRYBAK will soon follow.

*RENT, DOTUGRN HRZR X, ZRNHR GVRXGK-SXR, ATDLH

SXAK "I." RPDRNUG: "RZR X B *TNGTPRNPRH GOR LB XJ,

YS CTLR T YRDNRR, GOTG VOTGHSRZR N *RENT HOTAA

NRMFBNR SW KSF, BG QR YSXR HURRYBAK."

No. 5333—Financial Policy. By John DeVore. GES, DBGE, GN, and DEBTS represent common short words which may be identified by comparison. Continue with phrase ONG XNOHBHG; etc.

"GN BOXKSZHS NFK VSYGH," HZBV *KNYSKG *PNKKBH,

"DEBTS GES LKNHLSXG NU LZABOR GESP VBPBOBHESH,

VNSH ONG XNOHBHG DBGE PA BVSZH NU BOGSRKBGA."

No. 5334—Convenient Clues. By Carl Ardra. Two-letter word PJ and ending -PJD provide quick entry. Or compare ZUR, ZT, and ZUTFR, using UPJZF as check word.

PJ FTQSPJD HPVURA FRHARZF, URQVCKQ UPJZF XAR

JRXAQM XQG XMF ZT NR CTKJL PJ ZUR URXLQPJR F CTA

RXHU VATNQRE, VQKF ZUTFR DPSRJ PJ ZUR VARXENQR.

No. 5335—Basic Sensations. By Joseph Miller. Identify LUEDD by observing words following colon in first sentence. Or start with suffixes -ZGYN and -LZHGN, and fill in NTZDGTD. NTZDGTD EDTHYGZSDN HGAB LUEDD KEZFREB UOFRG

DFHLZHGN: AHPD, XDRE, URLD. RAA HLUDE XDDAZGYN

RED EDYREVDV RN FHVZXZTRLZHGN HX LUDND LUEDD.

No. 5336—College Daze. By Waggoner. Work on connective BET and *LVYFYVBET. Or compare UDHZ and HZYDP, noting HUG, UGE, and GRRGEYEHN.

HUG RPYNDTYEHN, *ZBAYN, BET *LVYFYVBET DE ODPNH

HYPs, UGE GOODLY UDHZ YVYLHGpBV FGHY SBXGPDHA,

HZGKCZ *HDVTYE BET *ZBPPDNGE, HZYDP PYNRYLHDFY

GRRGEYEHN, JGHZ RGVVYT RGRKVPB FGHY SBXGPDHDYN.

No. 5337—Rump Session. By Captain Kidd. Note two-letter word AU in connection with ending -KAEU. Substitute letters thus found, in pattern ZEHHAkkOO, and fill in.

ZARAZ LEGS, PX AU NFHY, TEBGY KFPUC HOOK, VNZOY

ZEHHAKKOO XPLBAZAKS TONG, YTEPBGOFY ELBADNKAEU,

FALY ZEHHPUAKS ZTOYK GFARO, TNUGY HNSEF QEAUK

FOXEFK, BODY VEF VNYK NZKAEU. TAX, TAX, TPFNT!

No. 5338—Lethal Element. By H. L. Kruger. Identify UJGVJ, following comma, and UGRJ, by comparison. Substitute in UAGEJR and JHTTGXGV, and fill in missing letters.

"JABSO JOLTHEAP," LHDCZA-UAGEJR JOLTHEAP GFHRHNA

LADRATGDY, VHYNHDPLAL UGRJ HKOEAP, XHTYF "JABSO

UBRAT," UJGVJ UHDZL AYNHUAT NTHMAVRAL "JAZZ

CHYC," JHTTGXGV NZDRHPGDY-FNBtQAL FDNATCHYCI

No. 5339—Final Vowel. By †C. Retherford. Guess the 3-letter connective BUG in word series. Next, complete SVUIVUBUDI. Then try VUYL and IYLYL.

PVWGI PMDE SVUIVUBUDI VUYL NHD HIMUF "L" TVW

OVSBYMKBDMVU: RL, ALZ, ELRU, RLDE, YLUZ, ZLID,

IYLYL, ZLYLY, RLWWEL, ILKLFL, FLAIL, BUG WELDER.

No. 5340—Trapped Twirler. By Vulcan. Asterisks in cryptograms are prefixed to capitalized words. Spot your own clues, fans, in this final message!

STRONG, TAXHL AKpLOUAA REGYTLE KNNKEYON, ANNA

VUARNG THOYBF AUDN, ONUGHA BYVSXHURXYH, ANBGNROP

RUFNA BUAE, CNQNOA. KNGDNBR CYS? AONTRE DXHZA

EXZNYTR, HTVSNGA ABGXSSONZ TKYH QUOO. BUTLER!

INFLUX of new fans and former crypto-enthusiasts returning to our friendly circle after time out for various reasons continues on the upswing! Newcomers welcomed at this time are N. H., Mrs. J. E. Michell, Walter K. Newman, Carl Ardra, and A. D. Walters. And oldtimers again with us after periods of inactivity include two cryptofans who have been away for five years. *Frank Morris, score 625 in Jan., 1946, and *S. R. Hart, 871 in May, 1946; †Gus, back after four years absence, score 220 in May, 1947; and *Gunga Din, score 856 in Jan., 1949, returned after time out for two years. Carl Ardra, who publishes his first cipher, No. 5334, in this issue, appends these words with his first set of sols. "Although mining men usually don't know where they'll be the next week, I have been fortunate in the last three years in getting your cryptograms regularly, and usually solve them all." Welcome, fans, one and all! Every answer sent in is listed to your credit in our regularly published solvers' clubs. Even a single solution puts your name in the list!

No. X-5342—The Two-Fifths Puzzle. By †Rebbina.

A spendthrift had a certain sum of money. He went to the fair, paying \$5.00 to enter, and spent two-fifths of the remainder of his money. The second day he spent \$5.00 to enter, and two-fifths of the remainder. The third day he paid \$5.00 to enter, two-fifths of what remained at a rifle game, and two-fifths of what was then left at a lunch cart. He had a small bit of change left, but loaned a penny to a friend, then spent two-fifths of the remainder. He loaned another penny and spent two-fifths of what was left. Loaned two more pennies and spent two-fifths of the remainder.

He now had just six cents for his bus fare home. How much money did he originally have?

Some fancy figuring crops up in †Rebbina's current special puzzle, No. X-5342. See if you can discover how much money was originally in the pocket of the reckless spendthrift, who decided not to climb the fairground fence on the fourth day, swipe a hot dog sandwich, and hitch-hike home. †Diana Forrest's No. X-5330, cryptic multiplication in last issue, used the key-phrase BLACK ROGUE, numbered from zero up to nine. Symbol B in the multiplier GABLE, without corresponding product, was revealed as zero; CLARK \times L = CLARK gave L as one; sequence LA indicated in last two lines then showed A as two; etc. Answer to No. X-5342 will appear in the next issue.

Another first contribution also appears in this issue, No. 5331 by †Anidem, who has been following SCS since Feb., 1940, but has never before sent in a crypt for the rest of you to wrestle with. Let's use this one to start the beginners! Thus, first try R, used alone, as single-letter-word "a." Next, substitute this "a" for R wherever it occurs in the cipher. You will thus get KZRRK with "—a—" for 3rd letter, first and last letters alike, suggesting "that." Substituting throughout for K (t-) and Z (h), KZV (th-) and KF (t-) will next follow as "the"

and "to." And so on with the rest. Answers to all of the current puzzles will be given in next issue!

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5319—Ciphers are both entertaining and instructive. I wish we could have cryptograms every month instead of every other month. How about it?

5320—"My brother has just expired!" mourned recipient of black-bordered envelope. "How do you know, before opening the letter?" queried friend. "By recognizing his writing!" replied relative.

5321—Newspaper headline announcing birth of triplets, quoted stork's arrival in poker terminology, thus: "Three of a kind gives pair full house!"

5322—Riding the rods once was freight-train terror for jungle outcasts. Weight on rope, lowered under speeding cars by hostile hoboes, bounded from roadbed, beating unwanted bum into pulp.

5323—Old-time pilots fly "crates," and are called "throttle jockeys." Present-day jet fliers are "fire-can jockeys," and ride the "blow-torch."

5324—Quoth scantily clothed, ill-fed, poorly housed, hoosegow cockroach: "Carrying messages from rear cell to front cell irks my sacroiliac region."

5325—So-called "seven follies of science": squaring the circle; duplicating the cube; trisecting the angle; perpetual motion; transmutation of metals; fixation of mercury; elixir of life.

5326—Husky gent strides into bus station, hauls out black cigar, gets light, puffs stifling smoke clouds, discards butt, spits upon floor, leaves.

5327—Tropical electric eel haunts murky swamp water; despite poor eyesight, locates prey, obstacles, using electrical discharge, receptor organs; develops six-hundred-volt wallop, kills hordes.

5328—Pancratium panorama: precipitant pugilist proclaims prejudicial predilection, portends pandemonium. Promoter palliates paltry palaver, prevents precarious predicament. Pfaugh!

5329—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
N I G H T M A R E S

No. 5341—Cryptic Division. By †Retlaw. The key is a 10 letter word, numbered from 0 up to 9. Find value of P in 2nd subtraction. Then try for symbol A.

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A M E ) S M K D T O ( M A S
      S O D S
        S E K T
        S K M P
          O T T O
          O P D R
            S T A
  
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All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

(Cipher Solvers' Club on page 129)

*The Droop was flirting with forever
the night he set out to make his
last big killing—with himself
as the corpse!*



*The blue line of flame
lanced across his gunhand
and he screamed. . . .*

COME SHARE MY KILL

By Robert Carlton

SURE, I was the Droop. Can I help it if my head hung and I sagged like a sunflower at dusk? Ten years in prison makes a man droopy, walking in lines that go nowhere, hunched under double-decked iron bunks, waiting and thinking. I did time the hard way, not on

my ear. I guess I'd always done things the hard way, ever since I was a kid down on Second Street. Or maybe I was just plain brainless. A guy who's lost twice to the law can't claim he's smart.

I was like a sunflower other ways, too. A sunflower turns with the sun, following

it across the sky until night comes. I followed Mark Burnside. He was my sun, my light. Call it hero worship, call it brotherhood, or maybe it was respect. Mark came from the clean, light places, the hills above Rand City. I came from the gutter, the dark alleys.

"Everett," he said, the first time I met him, "you're guilty of burglary and you're going to prison. I'll do my best with Judge Snyder to get you a light sentence. While you're at Stateville this time, start believing in something—in God, yourself, or a fellow man. If you lose again, it's for life."

That's the way he talked, clean, square, honest. I hadn't asked him to represent me. Mark Burnside was no cheap crook's mouthpiece. He wasn't a public defender, but now and then he took a charity case, like any doctor or lawyer with a heart. In his plea for mercy before Judge Snyder, he admitted I was guilty of burning the loan company's safe open, but he said the people were guilty, too, of tolerating conditions that kept some kids from getting farther than the sixth grade, shoved them out in the slums to become juvenile delinquents. I got one to ten, which wasn't bad for a second rap. Up the river, Mark sent me money for cigs and brought me books to read—strange, wonderful books, like Dickens and Thackeray, later Gibbons and Kant. So I did the one to ten, and began believing in somebody.

I began to believe in Mark Burnside.

BUT THIS started one Saturday afternoon in Eddie's First Street Bar, in the back room, where there's privacy from the juke box. Maxie Ryman sat across the table from me—flat-faced, wise-eyed Maxie, front man and fixer, sometimes fence.

"Droop, it's a cinch," he said. "A first-class cracksmen like you can open it in five minutes. It ain't even a nitro job. You can burn it open, slice it like a rotten apple."

He was talking about the Connor Hardware safe. I sipped my beer. I was down to my last five bucks. It sounded good.

"It's worth five grand," Maxie continued. "Saturdays they got a big business. You can do the job tomorrow night. I got it fixed."

"How do you mean, fixed?" I asked.

Maxie looked mysterious. "The beat cop will be busy the other end of his route, and the squad car boys are gonna cruise in the park. You can't get a rumble, Droop. Orders will come down from the top."

"How much cut to you?"

Maxie leaned forward, black eyes glittering avariciously, diamond stickpin gleaming in the pasty light. "Suppose you can five grand. Two for you, two for me, one for the boss—okay?"

I shook my head. "It's getting so an honest yegg can't work in Rand City, the fix nut is so high—but that's not why the answer is no, Maxie. I'm through with the racket. I can't lose again."

"But the fix is in!" Maxie protested.

"It was in the last time, Maxie, but something happened then and I took the rap."

"That was different, Droop—an accident. The big boss was involved. You had to fall."

"Sure," I said bitterly. "Sure, and he didn't even hire me a mouthpiece. Mark Burnside came to my rescue. I know I'm small potatoes, Maxie, but I don't let my friends down."

Maxie tossed his whiskey off, wiped his thick lips. "How you gonna live?" he sneered. "Sell papers? You can't even get a corner in this town without the boss' okay."

I shrugged. "Maybe I'll take a job driving for Mark Burnside. He offered me a hundred and fifty a month."

Maxie's mouth got thin, hard. He poked a stubby finger across the table. "You lay offa that guy, understand? We don't want

no boys who've worked for us fooling with Burnside. The boss might resent it, and you know what that means. Anyway," he added darkly, "on that lug the fix is in."

I saw what he meant Sunday morning. Over coffee and cakes at Jake's Diner, I read the headlines in the *Globe*.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY CANDIDATE ARRESTED
FOR MURDER

Mark Burnside, the Coalition Party's candidate for public prosecutor in the coming election, was arrested early this morning by Nix Landon, special investigator for the district attorney's office. Questioned concerning the murder last night of Lin Malcom, news commentator for station WLXW, Mr. Burnside denied knowledge of the crime. Police, however, allegedly found Mr. Burnside's fingerprints at the scene of the crime, and the murder gun was found in the attorney's car.

Lin Malcom was killed in his office after a political debate between Mr. Burnside and the incumbent, Wilson Mervale, during which Malcom accused Mr. Burnside of using forged documents to smear the district attorney's office with graft and corruption—

I laid the paper down and motioned Jake to bring me another cup of coffee. I sipped the coffee slow, letting the news sink deep, remembering Mark's favors, his giving without thought of return. I thought about the times he'd talked through the prison screen, cheering me, giving me hope. I thought about how Hannah Martin, his fiancée, must feel this morning. Hannah and Mark, who never called me Droop, but Everett, the name my mother gave me. Good people, nice people—and Mark was no murderer. Yes, I believed in Mark Burnside, but dimly I saw more.

Now the rats would run for their holes, the fair weather pals would trot for shelter.

Now Mark needed a friend.

I GOT my shoes shined, my suit pressed, and went to see Hannah. Her two-story frame house sat on the bluff above the river in Washington Heights. The downstairs she used as an office, and

the gold lettering on the door read: HANNAH MARTIN, CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGIST.

I took my hat off as she let me in, and like always, I straightened up some. She made me feel better, more like a man. Her voice was cheery, her smile bright, but her face was wan, and under her warm brown eyes dark circles showed, which meant she hadn't slept much.

She led me into the office, seated me in a comfortable leather chair.

"How are you, Everett?" she asked. "We haven't seen much of you since you came back to town. I'd been hoping you'd drop in. Is everything all right? Is there anything you want or need?"

Not a word about her trouble. I looked down at my hat.

"How bad is it?" I asked.

She didn't sidestep. She could meet an issue, too. "Pretty bad, I'm afraid." Her eyes got far-off. "They won't let anyone see him, but the attorney general is on his way here from the capital, and he may help. Finding the gun in Mark's car was bad, and Mark was alone with Mr. Malcom in the office after the broadcast. They found the—the body an hour later."

"How did he happen to go to Malcom's office?" I asked.

She glanced at me oddly. "I suppose he wanted to see the documents Mr. Malcom said he'd gained possession of. Later he said he tried to convince Malcom they were spurious."

"He'd have a hard time doing that, Miss Hannah. Malcom worked for the boss, too."

"Who is the boss, Everett?"

My shoulders dropped. "I think you know, Miss Hannah. What about the gun?"

"It wasn't Mark's. He doesn't own a gun. The police—that is, Mr. Landon from the district attorney's office—found it. Why, Everett?"

"Just funny, that's all," I shrugged.

"Funny a D.A.'s investigator would be prying into a killing that soon. Usually the homicide squad—"

"Everett!" She rose slowly behind the desk, her eyes widening. "Everett, do you mean—"

"I don't mean anything right now," I said, getting up, too. "But, look, Miss Hannah, something's plenty queer. You sit tight and don't let anybody know you've talked to me. I want to look around some."

She caught my arm as I started for the door, turned me around, made me look into her eyes. They were concerned, but not for Mark or herself.

"I wish you wouldn't," she said quietly. "You might get into trouble. Mark wouldn't like that, and you're a two-time loser, Everett."

Something flowed from her eyes. Call it courage, call it determination, or maybe it was hope. Hope that someday I could meet a girl like her, a girl with understanding and sympathy. I lowered my head, but not because I felt droopy, because her eyes were misty.

"A man gets three strikes," I said. "I've got the big one left."

I took the streetcar to the radio station. WLXW's towers rose over the midtown section, lacy fingers reaching for the sky. The receptionist girl eyed me suspiciously.

"We didn't call the burglar alarm people," she said.

"It's the regular yearly check," I told her. "We want to make sure everything is in order. You can send a man around with me."

She called a janitor and we toured the plant. I made it look good, checked lead wires and window connections. Outside Malcom's office, I paused, jerked a thumb at the closed door.

"How about this?" I asked. "It's on the first floor, and has outside windows. We better take a look-see."

The janitor unlocked the door reluct-

antly. "A guy was killed in here last night," he grumbled. "I'm not going past the door."

"You afraid of ghosts?" I grinned and pushed past him. "He's dead and harmless. Ghosts don't bother janitors anyway."

He watched from the door as I inspected the office. It was small but furnished well. A long divan opposite the glass-topped desk looked comfortable. My feet sank soundlessly into the thick carpet, and I couldn't hear any noise, so probably the office was soundproof, being in a radio station. In one corner was a cheesebox, a small square safe I could almost pry open, strictly a burn job, no nitro needed. I inspected the windows. One side, they opened to the parking lot. It was a cinch.

I turned to the janitor. "Go outside in the lot and try this window," I told him. "The trip needs adjusting."

He disappeared from the doorway. I got a short length of insulated wire from my coat and by-passed the trip, then cut the wire between. It took maybe thirty seconds. I was through and waiting when the janitor appeared on the lot. I motioned him to raise the window.

"Okay," I said, as he leaned over the sill. "It's fixed now. You can put the window down. We're all through, and there's not a ghost around."

ON THE sidewalk outside the station I ran into Nix Landon. The D.A.'s investigator was a big buy, six feet two. He had a mean face, sharp eyes and buck teeth. I tugged my hat low over my eyes, and tried to slouch past him. Why they called him Nix I don't know, unless it was because he said no to everything and saved his yesses for the boss. He's nixed lots of boys in Rand City, had the nasty habit of shooting first and asking questions later, a habit the boss found handy at times. He blocked my path.

"Droop." His voice had a grating nasal sound. "What are you doing in this neighborhood?"

I put on my best whine. "What's wrong with this neighborhood? There's plenty of ice chests midtown. Can't a guy look around?"

"Yeah?" He stared at me unblinking. "Get the hell down on the Skid where you belong. If you're wanted up here, somebody'll let you know."

I waited at the corner, saw him turn into the station. Maybe he'd seen me come out, maybe not. I had to chance it. The paper hadn't mentioned any forged documents being found. That meant they had to be someplace—maybe in Malcom's safe.

I phoned Maxie from my flophouse. "I changed my mind," I told him. "Get me a burn outfit, and put it in the turtle back of a car. Park the car in the Center Garage on the ground floor. I'll pick it up about midnight."

"Now you're getting smart," Maxie said. "All right, Droop. I'll fix it. Meet me at Jake's around three, and we'll cut the take."

"Sure," I said. "I'll meet you."

I cleaned and loaded my .38, packed the tools I'd need in a briefcase, and sat down to wait. Ordinarily I don't lug a rod, but this time I was taking no chances. While I waited, I figured. Mark was running for D.A., and the election was only a month off. It added up, all but the gun. They'd need to pin the gun on Mark, or they'd have a weak case; but they had fixers, lots of fixers. They'd have no trouble. Maybe I'd have to do two jobs instead of one. I laughed shakily. I'd better have a big third strike.

The moon was out, the city quiet when I drove away from the Center Garage. I headed toward the Connor Hardware, then cut across town to WLXW. The building was dark, except for lights in the second-story control rooms. After ten,

WLXW carried no live programs, sent everything out from the network pipes. I parked in the lot, backed the coupe to Malcom's window. The window was easy and the bypass hadn't been discovered. I slipped the catch with a thin-bladed knife, and ran the hose through. The hose was long enough to reach the safe, so it wasn't necessary to take the suitcase out and lug the tanks inside. I opened the pressure valves, brought the acetylene up to fifteen, the oxygen to thirty-five, and climbed inside the office.

I pulled the window down on the hose, so only a half-inch crack showed. Then I drew the blinds, covered them with throw rugs, to be doubly safe from glare. I put on a pair of leather gloves to keep the sparks off my hands, and screwed the burning tip into the hose nozzle. Maxie had got me a good, clean tip—so that meant a fast job. The sickly sweet smell of acetylene rose as I opened the gas valve and sparked my lighter across the tip.

The flame fanned out two feet. I pulled on a pair of number five goggles and brought the flame down with oxygen until it was a fine blue line burning in a halo of green fire. A soft hiss filled Malcom's office as I put the tip to the safe, above the combination. I heated the steel until it was white, mushy—then I squeezed down on the oxygen handle.

Sparks showered across the office, the walls glowed red, and the oxygen bit through the steel as if it were melting butter. I cut around the combination slow, knocked it off with a slag hammer. I reached my gloved hand through the hole, slid the lock back, and swung the safe door open. Inside was a thin metal door with a common key lock. I pried it open with a chisel, and I was there.

I got my flashlight out and prowled the safe. What got me was the tin box he kept inside, not much better than the cheese-box. I ripped the lock open with a screw-

driver, and my excited fingers riffled the papers he'd kept. Then everything went haywire and I was behind the eight ball. Malcom had no secrets, no documents. The box contained only blank paper—blank, folded paper.

Squatting there, I couldn't figure it, simply couldn't get it straight in my mind. I'd figured the boss wanted the papers, would probably impound the safe Monday and go through it, removing what he wanted all nice and legal, like he planned on hanging Mark.

Then I got a faint glimmering of his plan.

I got out of there fast, winding up the hose. Only I didn't get out fast enough, or maybe it was just a bad break. I was putting the turtle back down when a harness bull walked into the lot—not a city cop, but a private patrol, making the round.

He walked over as I opened the car door. "Just a minute, buddy," he rumbled. "What are you doing in here?"

"I work here," I said. Tenseness crept into my voice, despite trying to be casual. "I'm one of the engineers on my way home."

He eyed me suspiciously. "I've never seen you before."

"So what?" I asked. "You've never seen the King of Siam, but does that mean he's not alive? Go try some doors, I've got a wife and two kids waiting for me."

"Smart guy, huh?" He pushed the car door closed. "What's the window doing open?"

I glanced at the window, saw it was up an inch at the bottom. It's little things trip you when you hurry. I reached for my hip and he went for his holster. Only his holster flap was buttoned down. I whipped the .38's barrel across his head and he caved in.

"I was hoping you wouldn't see that," I said, as he sprawled on the pavement.

The pressure built in my chest as I

drove away. Now I had to hurry. When the private cop came to, the alarm would be out, and Malcom's office burglarized would mean plenty to Nix Landon, who was nobody's fool.

I stopped at a drugstore and phoned Hannah Martin. I made it short and simple, and she asked no questions.

LIGHTS showed in the Criminal Courts building. They always did, all night. Police headquarters occupied the basement, with some detective bureaus on the first floor. The three top stories housed the jail, and the D.A.'s office was on three. I thought about it as I parked the coupe and unloaded the suitcase. In the Criminal Courts building you went up, from police headquarters to the top floor jail, then to the joint upstate. If I went up again, there'd be no coming down—ever.

The suitcase was heavy as hell, even those dwarf-size tanks weighed plenty. The elevator man took me to three. I got out, noted the stair's location, and went to the D.A.'s office. A light burned in the antechamber, not unusual either—a deputy was on duty all night.

I pushed the door open, walked inside. The deputy looked up from a newspaper on his desk—a hawk-nosed, swarthy-faced man named Leonard Gee, another of the boss's stooges.

"Hello, Gee," I said, pulling the .38. "I've come to rob your safe."

He started to get up, stunned surprise in his eyes, then dropped back in the chair. "The Droop," he said. He laughed hollowly, mockingly. "They all go stir crazy sooner or later. You can't rob the D.A.'s safe!"

"Says you." I pushed past the counter. "In this suitcase I have what it takes to rob almost any safe. Close your eyes, Gee."

He shrunk back in the chair as I lifted the gun. "Wait a minute," he bleated,

fear brightening his eyes. "There's no dough in the safe. Wait—"

"I don't want dough," I said grimly. "Some of the boys in the joint would give their last smoke for this pleasure."

I cracked the barrel over his head. He sighed and slumped across the desk.

The safe inside the inner office was door-high, flush to the wall. I looked it over as I hooked up. It would be a tough burn job. I was right. Inside the outer steel sheath, I ran into a layer of cast iron. You can't cut through cast iron. I had to melt it down. The job took time, while the torch's heat fanned my face, brought out the sweat. Twice I went out and looked at Gee. Finally I tied him up. Then the phone started ringing insistently. I ignored it, afraid of what the call might mean. The patrolman had revived long ago, and the alarm was out.

I began to work desperately, turning the gas pressure higher, blazing oxygen to the iron. I had a foot-wide spot glowing red by the time I got through, and the floor under the safe was burning from molten metal. Then I hit steel again, and the going was better. Finally I got the combination off, and reached for the levers. I was in such a hurry I didn't shut the torch off.

It hissed in my hand as I fumbled inside the safe. Then the office door swung open, and Nix Landon walked in.

I turned around slow, pulling my arm from the hole. Nix held a service pistol on me and his face was death itself. I saw his finger tighten on the trigger, remembered his nasty habit. My gun was three feet away on the floor, and I couldn't make it.

"Hold it, Nix," I said. "If you squeeze that trigger you'll hang the boss."

His eyes were cold, merciless, but his finger slackened. "Just what the hell are you pulling, Droop?" His voice was thin, edged. "I got the word Malcom's safe was blown, and remembered seeing you out

there today. Come on, damn you, talk!"

"I'm talking," I said. "I got some papers from Malcom's safe. From now on you guys are paying me. I'm through cutting into cheeseboxes for peanuts. I want the big dough, and the boss has it."

He lowered the gun slightly, walked over to the safe. "Where's the papers?"

"In a good place." It was a grim bluff and I was gambling with instant death. "If you blast me, Nix, you blast yourself. I've got plenty on you, too. Be smart. Put that gun away, and maybe we can deal."

His eyes narrowed. He glanced past me at the safe. "What do you want in there, Droop? That's the D.A.'s safe."

"Yeah," I said. "So it is."

I said he was smart, nobody's fool. I saw I hadn't pulled the wool over his blinkers, so I clammed up, and pointed the tip.

"You want a gun, don't you, Droop?" Nix said softly. "There were no papers in Malcom's safe. You're trying to uncook Mark Burnside's hash. Friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Yeah," I said. "Friend of mine."

The gun muzzle came up and his lips curled in an executioner's smile.

"All right, Droop. You asked for it."

"So did you," I said. I squeezed down on the oxygen handle, and the blue line of flame lanced across his gunhand. Nix screamed, dropped the gun, and grabbed his seared wrist. I backed away, holding the burning tip on him, so he could feel the heat.

"Open it," I said, nodding to the safe. "Open it quick, before I burn a hole through you, Nix."

He slouched over to the safe, reached inside and pulled the lever back, his face working with pain. I followed him into the vault, and there it was on a shelf—the murder gun—Exhibit A in the People vs. Mark Burnside. Alongside the gun was Exhibit B, already tagged and ready to be presented when the time was ripe—

a sheaf of forged documents that could hang a friend.

"Now, Nix, we'll take a little ride," I said, picking up my gun. "First you roll up the hose and put it in the suitcase. Then you phone the boss and tell him the attorney general wants to see him at Hannah Edwards' house."

I WAITED while the D.A.'s investigator performed his chores, then motioned him to carry the suitcase. "You go first, Nix. If we run into any of your pals, just say you're going away on a long vacation. I'll have a gun on your back that I won't mind using."

"You won't get away with this, Droop." His nasal twang was high-pitched. "You can't prove anything. You're just making the joint for life."

"Go on," I ordered, "start walking."

I followed close behind. We got out of the Criminal Courts building without incident, and I had Nix stow the burning outfit in the car. Then I waved him behind the wheel. He was silent on the drive to Washington Heights, busy with thoughts of homicide, probably.

Hannah Martin opened the door for us.

She took one look at the D.A.'s investigator, at my face, and went pale.

"It's all right, Miss Hannah," I said. "I had to do it this way. Is he here?"

She swallowed hard, nodded, and led us into her office. "Everett," she said tightly. "Suppose he doesn't believe. What about you? What about—"

"Third strike," I said, trying not to feel the pulse pounding in my throat.

We sat down to wait—Hannah putting nervously with the papers on her desk. Nix Landon drooped sullenly in his chair. I paced the floor, walking back and forth, keeping the gun on Nix, but glancing at Malcom's tin box and the murder gun on Hannah's desk. Every time I passed the closet door I shivered.

The doorbell jangled after years. Hannah rose, glanced at the closet, and disappeared into the hall. When she returned Wilson Mervale followed her into the office. The D.A. looked impeccable as always, ready to step into the courtroom, it seemed. The only sign of alarm was the tiny frown that creased his high forehead.

"What is the meaning of this, Landon? Why are you here with these people. Where is the attorney general?"

It was enough to break a private-eye's heart

For Willie Carmody had to turn down the dream-job of nursemaiding a tycoon's wacky daughter—for the charity case of fishing a flatfoot out of the homicide soup!

To learn how Willie had his cake and ate it too, see—

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"In the closet," I said. "I'll talk for him. He has a bad cold. This is a party. Mr. D.A., and you're the guest of honor. Your little playmate here is guilty of premeditated murder and I want you to put him under arrest. He killed Lin Malcom last night."

His eyes found mine, bland, innocently blue eyes, that revealed nothing. "Your face is familiar. Who are you?"

"They call me the Droop," I said thinly. "Until tonight I was one of the small fry around this town."

"Don't listen to him, boss." Nix lifted himself in the chair. "He blew two safes tonight, yours and Malcom's. He's got the murder gun and Malcom's papers."

"So?" The district attorney's face remained impassive. "That means nothing to me, except he's guilty of burglary."

"Sit down," I told Nix. "You don't know what's in Malcom's tin box, Mervale. Enough evidence to hang you six times."

Mervale smiled slightly, looked at Hannah Martin. "This is a simple plot to discredit me before the electorate and give your fiancé illegal freedom. It's your work, Miss Martin, and that makes you guilty of criminal conspiracy, a penitentiary offense."

"You try your cases before you get to court," I said. "Judge Snyder wouldn't like that. He's one man you never could buy—him and Mark Burnside."

"To hell with Judge Snyder," he snarled. "You have a gun on me, Droop. What do you want—money or your freedom from this new charge?"

"Neither," I said. "I want you to look in that box."

"Why should I?" Mervale shrugged. "You probably have some blank paper in it."

"What makes you think so?"

"It's what criminal conspirators often used for intimidation."

"You're the only conspirator in this

room, and an accessory to murder, too. I'll tell you why you think so. Mervale. You gave Malcom the forged papers to use against Mark. You suggested to Malcom that he invite Mark to his office after the broadcast to inspect them, and you had Nix, here, kill the announcer and replace the documents with blank paper. That way you could tell a jury Mark killed Malcom to get incriminating evidence. Only you weren't going to "discover" the new evidence until tomorrow when you would have Judge Snyder issue an order impounding the safe. You could not do it today—today was Sunday."

"Prove it," Mervale sneered.

"Sure," I said, lifting the lid of Malcom's box. "In here is no blank paper. I took it out. In here are the documents you couldn't get until tomorrow. I got them from your safe, Mr. D.A.—Exhibit B in the People vs. Mark Burnside, and the exhibit tag bears the official seal of the district attorney's office."

Mervale's face tightened suddenly.

"You couldn't wait," I said softly. "You had to have everything fixed."

"Nix put them there," Mervale shouted. "I'll arrest him—"

"No, you don't!" Nix jumped up. "I killed him on your orders."

"Sit down," I ordered. "Both of you. The attorney general can hear you without shouting. He's in the closet with an official stenographer."

YEAH, they called me the Droop, but reading Dickens and Thackeray, Gibbons and Kant does things to droopy minds, perks them up, gives them the ability to think clearly. Now that Mark Burnside is the new D.A., I'll have time to read more, only in a soft bed and not a steel bunk. In between times, I'm practicing holding my head up and my shoulders square. The new district attorney's investigator has to walk erect, like a man.



Answers to THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 37)

1. If one convict asked another for some "briars," he would be seeking some hacksaw blades.
2. In the language of the penitentiary inmate, "cake and wine" means bread and water.
3. True. In underworld slang, "dead" means reformed.
4. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he had lifted a "fawney," he would mean he had stolen a ring.
5. True. In the language of the underworld, a "high tober" is an expert thief.
6. A prison is said to be under "iron rule" when the discipline in it is extremely stiff.
7. Yes, weed killer used as a poison might very likely contain arsenic as a killing agent.
8. It might be quite wise to use artificial respiration to attempt to revive a person poisoned with aconite.
9. It takes perhaps fifteen to thirty seconds to prepare an opium pill and another thirty seconds to smoke it.
10. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he had just been released from the "little school," he would mean he had been sprung from a house of correction.
11. In the language of the underworld, a "pad" is an auto license.
12. If a crook acquaintance told you he had just "popped" a ring, that would mean he had pawned it.
13. The underworld slang term, "to root," means to rob.
14. If the chief of detective sent you out for a "skiboo," you should return with an individual who is skilled in gunfighting.
15. In crook slang, "snips" are wire-cutters.
16. If your confidence man acquaintance said he had a "spruce" on the hook, that would mean he had a sucker in tow.
17. True. "Squeeze rates" are exorbitant rates charged for protection.
18. False. Footprints made by a running person generally tend to be less readily visible and identifiable than footprints made by a walking person.
19. False. The width of tire marks will not always disclose the dimensions of the tire.
20. No. Comparison hairs taken from the head of a living person should generally be plucked from his head.

THE BIGGER THEY ARE

By D. L. Champion



CHAPTER ONE

Half a Cop

I SAT at my shining new desk in the outer office thumbing the pages of a magazine, puffing at my pipe and reflecting contentedly upon the sinecure which had fallen into my weary lap.

I had a two year contract in my pocket

which called for a salary calculated to delight the hearts of the Internal Revenue people. And unless I was seriously in error the job would be simple.

I sighed happily, then grinned as the rumble of an angry voice beat through the frosted glass door behind me. A moment later Captain Jerome Buckingham of the Police Department charged through the

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*Three feet from the
muzzle of the gun he
sprang....*

door like an outraged hippopotamus and slammed it behind him as if he were hurling a bomb upon Munich.

He fixed me with a baleful, flaming gaze. He pounded a large fist on my fancy desk and roared, "Latham, you've got to

He's smaller than a schoolboy but bigger than a crime wave; he's soft of voice but his bullets bark loud; he's the toughest little watchcharm dick that ever cracked a murder case—meet Ballantine Buckingham, the guy too tiny to kill!

stop him! He can't get away with this!"

I returned his glare blandly. Not the least of my new perquisites was the fact that I no longer had to listen respectfully while police captains were roaring.

"He's a citizen," I said. "He's twenty-one. And it's his own dough. How can I stop him? How can anyone?"

"You're helping him," said Buckingham. "You're chiseling a salary out of him. He'll make us all a laughingstock. His own flesh and blood. We've all been coppers. My father, my brother, myself. And now this. I won't have it!"

I drew deeply on my pipe. I said, "That statement reminds me of Goering's promise that no bombs would ever fall upon the Reich. You can't stop him, Captain."

Buckingham took a deep breath. His face was red as a cardinal's robe at sunset and he looked very much like an Irish balloon about to ascend. I said as much.

Buckingham called me a name which would have caused my maternal grandmother to have at him with her umbrella, turned on a heavy rubber heel and left the room. I hummed a gay little ditty and thought with overpowering smugness of all the twenty thousand patrolmen who were, at his very moment, pounding their vast pink feet on the unyielding pavements of the entire metropolitan area.

I was still engaged in this pleasant reverie when the girl came in. She was short and blonde. Her figure was—how shall I phrase it—socko. She was possessed of a pair of blue eyes, which at the moment were blurred with tears.

I stood up, took my pipe from my mouth, and looked at her inquiringly.

"Mr. Buckingham," she said. "I want to see Mr. Ballantine Buckingham, the detective."

That last phrase made it sound like a gag. I asked, "Who sent you?"

"A gentleman named Brannigan. He's a policeman at the Missing Persons Bureau. He said that he was afraid the

police weren't very competent, that if I really wanted results I should see Mr. Buckingham. He told me Mr. Buckingham was a first class detective."

I nodded my head. So this was what we were up against. Not only were we going to be kidded to death, but those morons at headquarters were going to rid themselves of every pest by sending them over to us. If Brannigan didn't think this blonde kid had anything, there was nothing we could do.

I was searching my vocabulary for some tactful phrases to get rid of her when the buzzer on my desk made an angry noise. I snapped the switch and said into the box, "Yeah?"

A voice, high and shrill, spoke from the box. "Latham, who's out there with you?"

"A young lady," I said. "She—"

"Well, why the devil don't you send her in?"

I closed the switch and shrugged my shoulders. It wasn't my responsibility any longer. I put my hand on the doorknob of the private office. I said, "This way, Miss—"

"Weldon," she said. "Marcia Weldon."

I LED her into an office which would have drawn no sneer from Cecil B. DeMille. It was a vast room, brilliant with light streaming from six windows. The rug was soft and luxurious. Had I not known better I would have believed it had been swiped from the lobby of Radio City Music Hall.

The desk was large enough for a fast game of pingpong and the chair behind looked like something crown princes used to sit on. And in all this vast space the white face of Mr. Buckingham looked like a lonely atom suspended in a cosmos.

His shoulders barely appeared above the desk. His face, rotund and tiny, was the unwrinkled face of a child. His mild blue eyes approved the girl. He lifted a Lilli-

putian hand and waved it gracefully in the direction of a chair.

"Ah," he said, "madam, sit down."

The Weldon girl stared at him in wonder and bewilderment. "I want to see Mr. Buckingham."

"I am Mr. Buckingham."

The girl approached, frowning and puzzled. "But—but you're a—a dwarf."

She clapped her hand over her mouth, vainly trying to retrieve her tactlessness.

Mr. Buckingham bristled. This was a sore point with him. "I am not a dwarf," he said severely. "I am a midget. There is a vast difference, as you would realize if you possessed any knowledge whatever of biology or heredity. A dwarf, for your information, is—"

Having heard this particular speech several hundred times since I had known him, I cut it off.

"Brannigan sent her down from Missing Persons," I told him. "Apparently, Miss Weldon wants to retain you."

"Naturally. Of course," said Mr. Buckingham as if clients retaining him were the most natural thing in the world. "Now, Miss Weldon, what is your trouble?"

The Weldon girl stared at him dubiously. In his high-heeled shoes, Mr. Buckingham was all of three feet and five inches. His baby face was a mask of ingenuousness. His tiny hand would have had enormous difficulty in holding a thirty-eight. All in all, he was the most unprepossessing detective in the world.

"Well," said the girl hesitantly, "I don't know Mr. Buckingham. Mr. Brannigan told me that you were—were a giant."

I got a little sore at Brannigan for that crack, but Mr. Buckingham took it in stride.

"A mental giant," he said coolly. "Doubtless he meant that."

Of course, Brannigan had never meant that at all, but somehow it impressed the

girl. She sat down in a huge, luxurious chair by the side of Mr. Buckingham's desk.

"I'm a fool," she said impulsively. "Of course, it's brains that a detective needs. Not muscle. Will you take my case; Mr. Buckingham?"

Would he take the case? Would the National Association of Manufacturers take a profit? Would the Marines take Guadalcanal?

"This morning," said the girl, "I was to be married. A civil ceremony at City Hall. My fiancé did not show up."

Now I was beginning to understand why Brannigan had sent her to us. Apparently she was a jilted bride whose lover had undergone an acute attack of bachelor's cold feet at the last minute. Naturally, that was a hypothesis which would not appeal to her. Foul play or a mysterious disappearance was a much more welcome theory. Her next words proved me right.

"I waited for him for three hours. Then I called his apartment. He wasn't there. His landlady told me he'd left the house quite early. Something has happened to him, Mr. Buckingham. Something terrible, I'm sure."

She applied a fragile Irish lace handkerchief to her blue eyes, and her shoulders shook with sobbing.

"Come, come," said Mr. Buckingham. "Pull yourself together. We have never yet failed our clients. Have we, Latham?"

Since we had never had a client in our lives before, I suppose my head-nodding was technically honest.

"Are you sure," I suggested, since it didn't appear to have occurred to Mr. Buckingham, "that your fiancé didn't just change his mind? Didn't just decide against the marriage?"

She lifted her head and stared at me with wet blue eyes as if she had just seen me beating an old woman with a baseball bat.

"How can you say that? We loved each other. Dearly. More than anything else in the world. He must have been physically unable to meet me. Mr. Buckingham, you have to do something. I can pay any reasonable fee."

Mr. Buckingham bowed. "We shall begin an investigation at once," he said. "You will give my assistant his name, address and other information about your fiancé. We have never yet failed a client, madam."

I ASKED the girl all the routine police questions I could think of. I wrote the answers dutifully down in my brand new notebook. It seemed to me that she left us somewhat reassured. Though why I didn't know.

"Of course," I said, "Brannigan sent her down here because he was certain she had nothing. Because he believed that her sweetheart took a powder and he's not technically a missing person at all. You realize you're being kidded?"

Mr. Buckingham's shoulders slumped. He looked at the moment like a dejected doll. "I know Brannigan's ribbing me," he said. "But wouldn't it be wonderful if something had really happened to this guy? Something terrible—and I found it out before the coppers. It certainly would give me the laugh on the department."

"Instead," shouted an angry voice from the doorway, "of the department having high hysterics about you."

A gold badge glittered in the subdued light of the office, and Lieutenant William Buckingham strode into the room. He was a big, broad-chested man who towered over Mr. Buckingham's vast desk and glowered down at the figurine behind it.

Mr. Buckingham waved the lieutenant away with a tiny hand. "It is no use, Lieutenant," he said firmly. "Your brother, the captain, has already been here. I am established in this business. In it I shall stay. I am a private detective."

"You are a public laughingstock!" roared the lieutenant. "Your father is a retired inspector. Your elder brother is a captain. I'm a lieutenant. And you dare to set yourself up as a private detective. Are you out of your senses?"

"Latham," said Mr. Buckingham, "throw him out."

I considered the situation for a long moment, during which Lieutenant William Buckingham blew up.

"You little punk!" he shouted. "You and your damned inferiority complex are making all the family into fools. Just because you couldn't be a real copper because of your size, you do this. You idiotic little runt. You—"

He broke off abruptly with the horrified embarrassment of a man who finds himself in church with no trousers. In the Buckingham family there were two inviolable rules. First, because the father was always addressed as inspector, the two elder brothers as captain and lieutenant respectively, Ballantine Buckingham was invariably entitled to the prefix mister before his name. The second unwritten law of the Buckingham ménage was the strict tribal taboo of any mention at all of Mr. Buckingham's stature.

Mr. Buckingham stared at his brother, and his blue eyes were cold and angry as the Arctic Sea. He took a deep breath. He pushed his capacious chair back from the desk and slid off its seat. For a moment his head disappeared behind the massive desk.

A moment later he reappeared around the side of the desk. He picked up an expensive wrought iron waste basket and turned it on its end. He climbed silently to the top of the basket. From that position he pulled himself up to the desk top. There, he straightened up, strode across the polished mahogany until he stood before his brother.

Their faces were less than six inches apart. The lieutenant's anger had been

partly dissolved by his embarrassment. He looked apprehensively at the flashing rage in Mr. Buckingham's eye. Mr. Buckingham lifted the most delicate hand on Manhattan Island. He swung it with every ounce of his strength through the air and brought it in smacking contact with his brother's face.

I stifled a laugh. Never before had I seen a police lieutenant slapped in the face without any attempt at retaliation. William Buckingham was a beaten man. Family reasons for not striking back were unimportant, but it was impossible for his six feet of bulk to attack an adversary almost half his size.

These things, however, did not occur to Mr. Buckingham. He clenched his tiny fists, danced lightly before his brother, and uttered his defiance in a high, shrill voice.

"Put up your hands, you bully! I'll thrash you until you apologize."

His left darted out and struck William Buckingham on the nose. The lieutenant, I knew, would much rather faced a platoon of the Japanese Army. He backed away from the desk and fled from the room.

Mr. Buckingham unclenched his hands. He climbed down from the desk top. He donned a magnificent fedora, picked up a small-sized walking stick, and said, "Latham, we may as well look into this case. We've nothing to lose even if the guy did take a powder. What's his name? Where does he live?"

His name, I reported, was Andrew Noble and he lived on the upper West Side. I followed Mr. Buckingham into the elevator, into the taxicab downstairs. We rode uptown in silence to keep a rendezvous with our first case.

OF COURSE it was a completely screwy setup. For three generations the Buckinghams had been coppers. Grandfather Buckingham had climbed all the way up to the rank of

deputy commissioner before a racket guy's gun had blasted him into Woodlawn Cemetery. His son, the inspector, had retired laden with honors some three years ago, leaving Jerome and William to carry on.

It had been assumed by everyone that the policeman tradition of the Buckinghams would stop dead in its tracks with Ballantine. Nature, genes and chromosomes had all gone slightly wacky when Ballantine was born. From a family of brawny, strapping men had come a midget—not a dwarf, as Mr. Buckingham was at constant pains to point out.

Dwarfs are a breed, a race which will beget dwarfs. A midget is a biological error which is not carried down to the next generation. In short, Mr. Buckingham's offspring, if any, would in all probability once more be strapping, brawny candidates for the department.

When it dawned upon the family that Ballantine had achieved his full growth at the age of nine, they realized it was useless for the youngest Buckingham to study for his civil service examination. Even if the junior member of the family were endowed with the deductive abilities of Sherlock Holmes and the courage and persistency of a Marine battalion, his physical deficiencies would forever bar him from the force.

The family realized this, resigned itself, and proceeded to spoil Ballantine thoroughly.

Ballantine grew up a cocky little guy. But it was an aggressive cockiness that anyone who had read the book knew was engendered by a frightful sense of inferiority. Since he realized he was not as other men physically, he devoted his time trying to impress everyone that he was vastly superior in every other respect.

At sixteen he had acquired more dignity than a senator. He flatly insisted upon being addressed as Mr. Buckingham, even by his most intimate friends. He invari-

able, called his father and brothers by their titles and they, humoring him, responded in kind.

His heart, however, was set on being a copper. Since joining the regular force was out of the question he had, for years, supplicated his father to advance him enough cash to enable him to open a private detective agency.

Along these lines he had got nowhere fast. The inspector and his elder sons were of no mind to face the jeers of their comrades with a three-foot-five-inch relative in the shamus business. For six years there existed a Buckingham family argument on this subject with Mr. Buckingham getting as far as the Japs on Guadalcanal.

Then, some three months ago, Aunt Harriet had died. She had left her entire fortune of about thirty thousand bucks to Ballantine Buckingham. As soon as he received the legacy he knew what to do with it.

He rented an office. He furnished it luxuriously. He called on me, who had been his best friend for years, and offered me a job as his assistant. For a week now we had been licensed private operatives. At first he had kept it from the family, but today, apparently, they had heard of the venture. For obvious reasons they didn't like it at all.

Even I didn't have much faith in the enterprise. True, Mr. Buckingham had a good head on his shoulders, but as a sleuth he was untried and utterly without experience. We were going to get no help whatever from the department, which looked on Mr. Buckingham as laughable, so we started on our own.

The case of our first client was about what we would have to expect. Braumigan had sent her along to us as a gag. Had he believed there was anything to the Weldon girl's story, he would have handled it himself.

We gained admittance to Andrew

Noble's apartment house by the simple expedient of ringing someone else's bell. I tried the doorknob of the flat and found it locked. I moved away and glanced inquiringly at Mr. Buckingham.

He was equal to the occasion. He produced a bunch of brand new, jangling skeleton keys from his pocket. At the fourth try he opened the door. He entered the room. I followed along dubiously. We had as much right breaking into this apartment as any other private citizen. If Noble found us here we would be in a jam on our very first business day.

THERE were two rooms and a tiny kitchenette. The living room was comfortably furnished with a huge writing desk taking up almost the entire north wall. It was to this object that Mr. Buckingham purposefully made his way.

He pulled himself up into the chair and began a systematic search of the drawers. After twenty minutes of this he sighed and shook his head. It was obvious he had found nothing. He looked over at me and frowned.

"Don't stand there like an idiot, Latham. Frisk the place. Look around."

"For what? Do you expect me to find Noble under the bed?"

"Look for clues. Scraps of paper with important messages written on them. People always leave a clue, don't they?"

"Only in magazines," I said. However, I went dutifully into the bedroom and looked around.

As I searched cursorily, I reflected that Mr. Buckingham's ideas of detection were obviously based on what he had read in books. Even if Andrew Noble had met with foul play, a premise of which I was most skeptical, I had little faith in Mr. Buckingham's ability to throw any light upon the case.

I was peering into the bathroom closet, when I heard his high-pitched voice.

"Latham! Latham! Come here, I have something."

I returned to the living room. Mr. Buckingham was standing by the side of a wastebasket, the top of which came up to his chest. He held half a dozen sheets of crumpled paper in his little hands.

"Here," he said, "what do you make of these?"

I glanced at the sheets of paper. Apparently, all of them had been intended as letters to the same person. One began, "Dear Katherine", and stopped right there. Another salutation read simply, "My dear Kate." A third started with no salutation at all, "I write this to tell you—" That ended as abruptly as the others.

"Well," I said, "it just looks as if a guy was finding it rather hard to write a letter to a girl. A common enough occurrence."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Buckingham, "he was writing to the Weldon girl, trying to tell her of some danger which threatened him."

"The only hole in that theory," I told him, "is that the Weldon girl's first name is Marcia."

Mr. Buckingham's face fell. A frown marred the childish smoothness of his brow. He bit a tiny fingernail.

"Well," he said at last, "I have another theory."

What that theory was I did not learn immediately. The outer door suddenly opened and a man stood on the threshold. He regarded us with something more than distaste.

He was a man of medium height and he was caparisoned rather than dressed. His suit was bottle green and its cut was strictly Broadway. His tie was a discord in red and yellow and a huge pearl was resting in its folds. Three rings sparkled on his fingers and his watch chain was a thing of weird and complicated links with an odd golden key hanging from it.

Mr. Buckingham returned his gaze coolly. He said, "Who are you?"

"Who am I? That's one hell of a question. Who are you? What the devil are you two guys doing here anyhow?"

"I am a detective," said Mr. Buckingham. "I—"

The man in the loud clothes gaped at him. He threw his head and roared with laughter.

"Detective?" he howled. "You? A miserable little runt like you?"

Again his laughter filled the room. Mr. Buckingham's face was crimson. His blue eyes were hot with wrath. He doubled up his fists and looked around the room for something to stand on. I put a hand upon his shoulder to dissuade him.

"Are you Andrew Noble?" I asked.

"Of course I'm Andrew Noble. And what the hell are you punks doing in my joint? Get out. Take a powder. Lam, both of you."

Mr. Buckingham, his cheeks still flaming, walked from the room. Ignominiously, I followed.

CHAPTER TWO

Promise of Death

OUT IN the street, I thought things over. I came to a depressing conclusion.

"So Brannigan was right," I said.

Mr. Buckingham turned on me. "What gives you that impression?"

"Obviously, Noble is all right. He just didn't want to marry the girl, so he didn't show up."

"Idiot," snapped Mr. Buckingham. "How do you know Noble's all right?"

"We just saw him, didn't we?"

"No, you fool. That wasn't Noble."

I stared at him in astonishment. "How can you know that?"

"Did you see his clothes?" demanded Mr. Buckingham. "Did you hear his ac-

cent? Did you notice his lousy syntax?"

"What has all that to do with it?"

"Did you see the key—the little golden key—that guy wore on his watch chain? It was a Phi Beta Kappa key. Did you ever see a guy who has taken scholastic honors dress like that, talk like that?"

I thought that over for a long time. "It sounds reasonable," I admitted. "But we don't know Noble. Maybe he's a phony guy."

"He's a legitimate Phi Beta," said Mr. Buckingham. "There was a letter in his desk from that organization. No, that Broadway Beau Brummell is a phony."

We returned to the office in silence. I felt a little better now about the detecting potentialities of Mr. Buckingham. It had never occurred to me that the stranger was a fake. I could find no hole in Mr. Buckingham's reasoning.

Outside our office door a portly man waited. He was well dressed and his fat, wrinkled face was vaguely familiar to me. He beamed with the air of a professional politician as we advanced.

"Mr. Buckingham," he said. "Ah, Mr. Buckingham. I am State Senator Browder."

He shook both our hands fervently as if we'd just rescued him from drowning. He followed us into the office. He lighted a most expensive cigar as Mr. Buckingham, with the aid of the upturned wastepaper basket, climbed into his massive chair. He said, "Mr. Buckingham, I have a case for you."

I sat down and mentally clapped my hand to my brow. Two clients in a single afternoon was something for the evening papers. Moreover, the advent of the Weldon girl was attributable to Brannigan's clowning. The arrival of a big shot like Browder was beyond understanding.

"You are a constituent of mine," said the senator. "And I always like to deal with my constituents. I have a little case here which I'd rather keep out of the

hands of the police. Incompetent fellows, for the most part. I'd prefer you to handle it for me, Mr. Buckingham."

Mr. Buckingham nodded. Apparently two clients in one day had rendered him speechless.

"It's about my daughter, Mr. Buckingham. She was to be married today. We waited at the church at the appointed time, but her intended husband never showed up. I tried to get in touch with him at his office and his home, but he wasn't anywhere. My daughter is hysterical, terrified that something has happened to him. I'd like you to trace him for me. Of course, the fee—"

Mr. Buckingham held up his little hand. "Wait a minute," he said. "Is this man's name Andrew Noble?"

Browder blinked. "Why, yes. But—"

"Is your daughter's name Katherine?"

This time the senator's jaw dropped. "Yes," he said. "Her name is Katherine. But how—"

"I am a detective," said Mr. Buckingham modestly.

The senator mopped his brow. It seemed to me that he appeared suddenly worried.

"Of course," he said confidentially, "it is quite likely that Noble merely jilted my daughter, backed out of the marriage at the last minute. I don't ask you press your investigation too much. I'm retaining you principally because of my daughter's anxiety. If, in a few days, you just report that Noble has gone to another town and is quite all right, I'd expect no more. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Buckingham, and there was a faraway, thoughtful expression on his face.

"Here," said the senator, opening a wallet and putting a bill on the desk. "This is a retainer. I am forced to go to the capital for three days. When I return I shall expect a report along the lines I have suggested. I shall pay the rest of the fee then."

He bestowed cigars on us with all the beneficence of the late John Rockefeller handing out a dime, and strode from the room like an actor.

I sniffed my cigar and lighted it. Mr. Buckingham stared at the far wall, a contemplative light in his blue eyes.

"Latham," he said at last, "we know the Weldon girl came here because Brannigan was ribbing us."

That was not only true, but obvious. I said so.

"All right. But why did Browder come here? He's a big shot. He's been around. Is there any reason why he should think we're any good as sleuths? Why did he come here instead of to the coppers or an established private agency?"

THE ANSWER to that was beyond me. I had been puzzling over it ever since the politician first had made his business known.

"Well," said Mr. Buckingham, "there is only one possible reason why Browder came here. I'm sure of it."

"And the reason is?"

He did not answer me. He said, instead, "How do you figure this Noble? Why should he arrange to marry two girls on the same day, and then jilt both of them?"

"I am a beat copper," I said. "I can break up a crap game with skill and facility. I am a good man in a riot and I can calm down a belligerent drunk with a skillful application of a nightstick. I cannot, however, tell you why Noble should line up two preachers on the same day."

I returned to the placid enjoyment of my free cigar. I put my feet up on the desk. With great good will I left the cerebral functioning to Mr. Buckingham.

"Latham," he said at last, "I have an idea."

I removed the cigar from my mouth

and gave my employer the respectful attention my salary called for.

"I am going out," he said. "I am going shopping. You will, in all probability, hear from me some time tomorrow. Wait here by the telephone. Don't be surprised at anything you may see or hear."

He slid out of his chair and thrust his head into his broad-brimmed fedora. He tucked his malacca cane underneath his arm and strode with magnificent dignity from the room.

I picked up the evening paper and relaxed. There was even less work to do in this sinecure than I had expected. A situation which would draw no protest from me at all.

I arrived at the office about ten o'clock the following morning. I made myself at ease in Mr. Buckingham's chair and proceeded to study a racing sheet with great diligence. I had worked my way down to the third race at Jamaica when the telephone rang.

I picked up the receiver. A husky feminine voice said, "Is this Mr. Latham?"

I admitted my identity.

"Mr. Latham," said the voice, "I really must apologize to you. I should have called you before. You must have been worried to death. But everything is all right. Little Bally is in good hands."

I blinked at myself in the pier glass on the opposite wall and said with astonishment, "Little who?"

"Bally. Your son. Little Bally."

I glanced at myself again in the pier glass and saw that I was utterly amazed.

"You see," said the thrilling voice, "when you were at the gas station Bally got out of the car and wandered around. He got lost in the woods. He turned up here. Of course, we fell in love with him at once. But it was only this morning that he remembered his daddy's telephone number. Can you forgive us for keeping him?"

I muttered some unintelligible Choctaw into the mouthpiece.

"He's dying to see you. Will you come out at once, Mr. Latham?"

My curiosity was such that I couldn't have kept away under any circumstances.

"I'm on the way," I said. "Where are you and Little Bally?"

"Thirty-two Elm Drive, in Sedgebrook, Long Island. It's the Browder estate."

I hung up, mopped my brow and wondered what sort of trouble Mr. Buckingham was heading for now. I jammed my hat on my head, dashed to the railroad station and was borne anxiously out into the middle of Long Island.

A taxi took me along a road which was paralleled by a high stone wall. We turned in past a caretaker's lodge, passed through a pair of wrought-iron gates, crunched over a gravel road and eventually pulled up before a high Colonial portico.

As I paid off the hack a butler emerged from the house. He lifted his eyebrows inquiringly and said, "Mr. Latham?"

I nodded.

"Miss Katherine is in the garden, sir. With Little Bally."

I followed him through a landscaped estate. "You know, Mr. Latham," he said, "you should be proud of Master Bally. He's captivated all of us."

With this buildup I thought I was prepared for anything at all. It developed I wasn't.

We came around the corner of the house to the edge of a swimming pool. At the side of the pool were two deck chairs. One was occupied by a blonde the sight of whom made me wish to be fifteen years younger, the other by a brunette who abruptly had me asking what the hell was fifteen years anyway.

But that was not all. On the brunette's lap sat Mr. Buckingham. He was wearing an Eton collar and the jacket which went with it. His hair was parted in the middle and his deep blue eyes had an expression

of diabolical cunning in their depths.

Weakly I pushed forward. The blonde said as I approached, "Katie, it's my turn to hold little Bally. Bally, come here and give your Aunt Edith a big kiss."

Mr. Buckingham met my eye shamelessly. He dropped his right eyelid in a deliberate wink. He turned his head around and took the blonde's kiss full on his lips.

Then he said, "More. I wanna kiss Auntie again."

"Isn't he wonderful, Kate?" said the blonde. She kissed Mr. Buckingham again.

My stomach turned slowly over. Now the brunette sprang to her feet. "Mr. Latham," she said, extending her hand. "I'm so glad you're here. Bally was a naughty boy to run away from your car. It's lucky we found him. Why, he might have been lost in the woods all night."

MR. BUCKINGHAM looked up at me and smiled sweetly. "Daddy," he said, stretching out his little arms; "my darling daddy."

A shudder ran through my frame. I was deathly afraid he was going to demand I kiss him. He spared me that, however.

"Daddy," he said again, "my aunts want us to stay here for the weekend. I wanna."

I am not a profligate fellow. I am no spendthrift. Yet at that moment I would willing have bartered five dollars cash for a stiff slug of whiskey. Katherine Browder put her hand on my arm.

"This," she said, indicating the blonde, "is my cousin, Alice. Bally has told us of the tragic death of your wife, of how lonely and miserable you are sitting home weekends. I know how you must feel. I've had an experience of my own that—but you don't want to hear that. Please stay, Mr. Latham. You and Bally."

Mr. Buckingham screwed up his face, opened his mouth and gave out with a bloodcurdling squall. "I don't wanna go

home, daddy! I want to stay with my nice aunts."

"Isn't he cute?" said the blonde. She ran her fingers through his hair and kissed him again.

With an effort I pulled myself together. "Very well," I said, "we shall stay the weekend. Could you show me to my room now? I'd like to speak to Mr.—to little Bally alone for a moment."

"Of course. You'll want to wash up. I'll call Raymond."

THE butler was summoned. Mr. Buckingham slid from the blonde's lap, took my hand trustingly. We followed the butler through the huge house to the second story, where we were ensconced in a two-room suite.

There was a decanter on the sideboard of the living room. I fell upon it. I gulped down a good four ounces and fixed Mr. Buckingham with an accusing eye.

"Do you care to explain this disgraceful conduct?" I demanded.

"Disgraceful?" said Mr. Buckingham. "I am merely working in disguise. If these women persist in mauling me in the belief that I am a child, I suffer their caresses as part of my job."

"You suffer their caresses? You seemed to be having one hell of a good time when I walked in."

"Naturally," said Mr. Buckingham. "I am a superb actor."

"You are a superb liar. Now what the devil is this all about?"

"My suspicions were aroused," said Mr. Buckingham. "Why, I shall tell you later. But I came to the conclusion that the answer to the disappearance of Andrew Noble was somewhere in this house. I wanted to get in and look around. What better disguise to assume than that of a pathetic lost child?"

"This is like no detection I ever saw after thirteen years on the force," I said. "Have you found out anything?"

Mr. Buckingham nodded gravely. He seemed very pleased with himself. "Yes. There is an old housekeeper here—Mrs. Barton. Her room is next door. She is a melancholy creature. She cries and prays all night long."

"Facts," I said ironically, "which have great bearing on the Noble case?"

"Correct. I didn't think you'd see it immediately."

"Damn you," I said, nettled. "I don't see anything at all. What are you talking about?"

"Mrs. Barton's window overlooks a secluded part of the garden. I have learned through subtle inquiry that, until recently, Mrs. Barton was a cheerful, gay old soul. And there was a full moon on the night of July seventeenth."

"And there was a blizzard in eighteen eighty-eight," I said. "So what?"

Mr. Buckingham didn't answer me. He took a cigarette from the pocket of his Eton jacket, and lighted it. He inhaled deeply. He paced the floor thoughtfully as I, once more, turned my full attention to the decanter.

"You—" said Mr. Buckingham, at last. "You will return to town. Make some excuse about needing pajamas or something. You will see that Weldon girl. You will get from her every bit of information about this Noble guy that you can. I simply have to figure a motive. She may furnish it."

"A motive? For what?"

"Murder," said Mr. Buckingham dramatically. "And get back here as soon as possible. You can help me keep those damned women off my neck."

I clucked in phony sympathy. "It must be awful to have those two girls constantly kissing you."

"No sacrifice," began Mr. Buckingham with sonorous hypocrisy, "is—"

I slammed the door on the rest of the sentence.

I went back to town and conducted a

long, detailed interview with Marcia Weldon. I tossed some pajamas and a toothbrush in an overnight bag, and set out once more for the Browder estate.

I arrived a little after eight o'clock, to be informed that "little Bally" was afflicted by a sudden stomach ache and had retired. I went up to our suite to find Mr. Buckingham propped up on the pillows smoking a cigar and reading a risqué novel he had pulled out of the bookcase.

"Thank the Lord, you're back," he said. "Listen, you'll have to sleep in the housekeeper's room tonight. I sent Browder a wire at the state capital a few hours ago. Of course I didn't tell him I was here. I informed him that work on the case was progressing—that I expected to gather some valuable facts from Mrs. Barton tomorrow morning."

I SAT DOWN and sighed. I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about. I said so.

"An hour or so after Browder received my wire," said Mr. Buckingham excitedly, "who do you think arrived here at the house?"

"Leo Durocher?"

"Will you stop clowning, you idiot? I tell you we're going to break this case. We're going to show up Brannigan and my brothers."

"All right, who showed up?"

"That guy who said he was Noble."

"You mean the guy with the fancy dress suit?"

Mr. Buckingham nodded.

"So," I asked, "what's that got to do with me sleeping in the housekeeper's room?"

"Well, you see, I'm supposed to be little Rollo with a bellyache. I've had to have the housekeeper 'minding' me, for two reasons. First, I had to get off to bed as soon as I saw Dreiland."

"Who's Dreiland?"

"The guy in the fancy suit who showed at Noble's."

"What's he doing here?"

"Browder's lawyer brought him along. Introduced him to Browder's daughter and announced he had important business with the senator. That he would stay here until the senator returned from the capital."

"That sounds odd, doesn't it?"

"Of course not. This is the way I planned it. But keep out of his way. He mustn't see either of us tonight. Now, in addition to that I've cried my little eyes out on the housekeeper's shoulder. She's going to sleep in here—just in case I should get sicker during the night."

"Why?"

"So that you can sleep in her room. Now do you get it?"

I didn't but I gave up. "Drop it," I said. "Do you want to hear what I found out from the Weldon girl?"

"Of course. Let's have it."

"Noble is a self-made, self-educated guy. Worked with his hands all his life, studied at night. He still works in a shipyard but, Weldon tells me, he's the brains behind the labor unions in this state. He holds no official position, but he wields one hell of a lot of influence."

Mr. Buckingham looked like Rodin's most celebrated piece of sculpture. I gathered that he expected me to inquire as to what profundity he was pondering. I didn't.

"As far as Weldon was concerned," I continued, "it was a whirlwind romance. He met her only two months ago. Apparently they went nuts about each other immediately. She insists that he was madly in love with her. Moreover—"

"Shut up," said Mr. Buckingham surprisingly, "I'm thinking."

"Well, you asked me to find out about him. Naturally, I thought you'd want to know—"

"I know enough," said Mr. Bucking-

ham. "The whole matter is in the palm of my hand."

"Then," I said, annoyed, "you won't need my aid. I suppose you have no further instructions?"

"Only that you keep out of this Dreiland's way so he won't recognize you. At bedtime you will sleep in Mrs. Barton's room. That is all. Damn, I forgot something."

"What?"

"Well, never mind. I can't do it anyway until after—"

"After what?"

"Oh, nothing. You'd better go to Mrs. Barton's quarters now. She knows you're to sleep there. I can't risk your going around mucking up things when the case may break."

I glared at him. "What the devil do you mean, mucking up things? I was a copper for—"

"I know," said Mr. Buckingham wearily, "for thirteen years. Now go away and leave me alone. I still have some thinking to do."

Indignant, I walked to the door. As my hand was on the knob, Mr. Buckingham spoke again.

"You have your gun, of course?"

"Of course."

"Sleep with it under your pillow. If you sleep."

I blinked at him and became aware of a sudden emptiness at the pit of my stomach. "Why?"

"I am testing a theory," said Mr. Buckingham. "I am interested in seeing if someone comes in and tries to murder you tonight."

"Murder me?" I gasped. "For what?"

Mr. Buckingham grinned as if the prospect of my violent demise was a pleasant thing, indeed.

"You are six feet tall," he said with an unpleasant chuckle, "I'm sure you can take care of yourself. Good night, Latham."

CHAPTER THREE

The Face of Murder

I WENT to bed in Mrs. Barton's room with the ease and tranquility of an infantryman dozing in a foxhole with the entire *Luftwaffe* overhead. There had been something disturbingly sinister about Mr. Buckingham's words. I was in no mood to be murdered merely to substantiate a theory.

Moreover, his conduct completely baffled me. Whether he actually had anything or not, I didn't know. He certainly was not investigating the case along the tried, true and routine lines laid down by the police department.

My first inclination was to discount his dialogue entirely. Yet it had seemed to me that there was a certain degree of grimness in his tone when he had spoken. Moreover, I know he would willingly sacrifice his right arm to solve this, his first case, to confound his brothers. He was quite capable of putting me in a tough spot if it would further his plans.

My police special was, as Mr. Buckingham had advised, stowed neatly beneath my pillow. The night was dark, and I was tired. However, I did not sleep. I felt rather like the guy who is spending the night in the haunted house in order to win a drunken bet.

I was aware of the ticking of my wrist watch as the night passed. Finally, my heavy eyes closed and in fitful fashion I slept.

I am a light sleeper. A creaking floorboard awakened me. I opened my eyes, stared into the darkness, and did not move a muscle. The sound of a stealthy footfall which I sensed rather than heard filtered into my consciousness.

I drew a deep breath and tensed my muscles. Slowly, silently, I moved my right hand along the sheet, thrust it beneath the pillow. My fingers had just

touched the reassuring butt of my pistol when something loomed before me, something darker than the darkness of the room.

The mattress sagged as a knee weighted it down. I heard a throaty snarl as I swung my body to the far side of the bed. A pair of throttling hands scraped against the back of my neck, then moved swiftly to the left in search of my jugular.

I brought my gun into action. I swung around, revolver in hand. Unluckily its muzzle struck one of the groping hands. Fingers of steel seized my wrist, forced my gun hand achingly back.

I clenched my left fist and hurled it through the air at a point where I judged my adversary's jaw was. My knuckles smashed into flesh and an angry, incredulous voice said, "Who the devil are you?"

I struck with my left again. I wrenched my right hand loose and swung my gun as a club. It landed on something hard and I heard a yelp of pain. A fist hit me squarely in the eye, knocking me back upon the pillow.

I heard hastily receding footsteps. The bedroom door opened. I saw a figure silhouetted in the dim light of the hall. The door slammed, and I was alone.

I stood blinking at myself in the glass, figuring the next move. Doubtless it had been Dreiland who had tried to strangle me. Mr. Buckingham's theory, I reflected bitterly, had been upheld. I was angry at both him and Dreiland. My immediate impulse was to seek out Dreiland and administer a Gene Krupa treatment upon his nose.

However, I was by no means certain as to which room was his. Besides, it probably was not part of Mr. Buckingham's plan for me to do anything, now that I had ably demonstrated that there would be no attempt made upon my life.

I locked the door, ruefully climbed back into the now chaotic sheets. I tried to go back to sleep.

About an hour and a half later—the first faint light of dawn was crawling over the window sill—I heard sneaking little footsteps in the hall. I recalled my black eye, and my anger blazed afresh. If Dreiland was coming back for another go at me, he could have it.

I got out of bed, unlocked the door, opened it and peered out into the hall. Mr. Buckingham, clad in a girl's nightgown, was gliding down the hall like an undeveloped ghost. Holding his pink crêpe de chine garment high so that he wouldn't trip, he looked rather like a drunken muralist's idea of a cherub.

I said in amazement, "What the devil are you doing out here?"

He shushed me with a sound like a leaking steampipe. He pushed his way into my room and closed the door behind him. He looked at my black eye with vast satisfaction and said, "So he did attack?"

"He did. And I don't like it. Now why are you wandering about the halls at this hour?"

"I had a chore to do. Had to wait until everyone was asleep."

"Now look here," I said sternly. "I know I'm getting a good salary. But if I want to risk my life for money, I'll figure some method of getting in the Marines. Suppose that thug had come in here with a gun and blasted me from the doorway? Where would I be now?"

"If you've led a decent life," said Mr. Buckingham blandly, "you'd be in heaven."

I glared at him. "There was nothing at all to worry about," he assured me airily. "You see, I figured Dreiland wouldn't want to alarm the house. So I figured he'd either strangle you or knife you. That'd give you a chance to come to grips with him."

I was speechless with indignation. "You figured?" I said at last. "Do you realize I might be dead now? Do you realize that—"

Mr. Buckingham held up his diminutive hand. "There, there," he said, as if he were talking to an unreasonable child. "Go to bed and get a nice rest. Your nerve is a little shaken, that's all."

"Good Lord," I exploded. "Yours isn't!"

He grinned at me and slipped out through the door again. I climbed back into bed seething with rage and indignation.

MR. BUCKINGHAM'S banging at my door roused me early. He wore an excited manner and there was a glitter in his eye as he watched me dress.

"Big things will happen this morning latham," he said. "My brothers, the captain and the lieutenant, are here."

I paused in the act of knotting my tie. During the past twenty-four hours Mr. Buckingham had committed several baffling actions. This last bewildered me no less than the others.

"Why?" I said. "Why are they here?"

"I sent for them."

"Again why?"

"To witness our triumph. Also to arrest the murderer."

"And," I said ironically, "to find the corpse."

"Naturally," said Mr. Buckingham. "After I tell them where it is."

I shut my mouth tightly and finished dressing. Mr. Buckingham led me down to the living room.

"Fortunately," he told me as he labored down the enormous staircase, "the girls are not early risers. I'd rather they weren't mixed up in this. And the senator is expected in about half an hour. That, of course, is ideal for our purpose."

"Ideal, indeed, for our purpose," I assured him. "And what the hell is our purpose?"

He didn't answer. He piloted me across

an ocean of oriental rug into the living room. There was a man there. It was neither Captain nor Lieutenant Buckingham. It was Dreiland. There was a scratch on the side of his face and his right eye was a revolting green.

His pupils narrowed as he saw us. A frown darkened his brow and the expression upon his face was a nice admixture of suspicion, calculation and apprehension. He no longer wore the Phi Beta pin on his watchchain, and the number of rings on his fingers had been reduced from three to two.

He studied my black eye through his green one.

"So," he said, "it was you in that bed last night. Now, what's the racket, you guys? Who are you and what are you doing? What's that dwarf doing dressed up like little Lord Fauntleroy?"

Mr. Buckingham flushed. His eyes flashed. "Had you the slightest knowledge, sir, of the matter, you would realize that a dwarf is—"

"Yes, yes," I said, shutting him off. Once embarked on his favorite peroration, he was good for twenty dull minutes.

"I still want to know who you guys are," demanded Dreiland.

"I told you once," said Mr. Buckingham. "And you laughed at me. We are detectives."

Dreiland stared at Mr. Buckingham incredulously. "You mean you're the guys the senator hired?"

"We're the guys," I told him.

"If you're dicks," said Dreiland, "I suppose I might ask if you've made any progress on the case."

"We certainly have," said Mr. Buckingham cheerfully and with what I considered an idiot's bright grin. "Or at least we're going to. Mrs. Barton knows something. I spent all last night trying to get her to tell it to me."

"And did she?"

"No. But she's promised to tell me what she knows this morning. As soon as she comes downstairs. We're waiting for her now. She's washing up in the living room of my suite. I'll have the matter completely solved when she comes downstairs."

I looked at him hard. He was prattling along at a great rate, showing remarkable friendliness to an individual who had attempted to slaughter the housekeeper in the middle of the night.

"Well," said Dreiland, "maybe you're better than I thought you were. I've got a little business to attend to now. I'll be seeing you around."

He walked from the room and to me his gait seemed purposeful. A suspicion took hold of me.

"Listen, you fool, suppose he's going upstairs to have another crack at the old woman. Why did you have to talk your brains out? Why—"

But Mr. Buckingham wasn't listening to me. He grabbed my arm. He said, "Quickly—we'll use the back stairway! Hurry!"

He dashed through the house with me at his high, diminutive heels. We rushed through a pantry where an astonished butler polished silver. We charged through a kitchen where coffee gurgled on the stove. We raced up a narrow back staircase like Roosevelt galloping up San Juan Hill.

We entered the door which led to the bedroom of the suite to which Mr. Buckingham and myself had been assigned. The first thing I observed was that now the communicating door to the living room was closed. My second and third observations, respectively, were Captain and Lieutenant Buckingham.

Jerome and William Buckingham stared down at their panting younger brother.

"What's this all about?" asked the captain. "The butler showed us in here and told us to wait. What's the idea of drag-

ging us out of bed at this hour of the morning?"

The lieutenant confined himself to inquiring in astounded accents, "What in the name of heaven are you doing in those baby clothes? Is this a gag?"

"Gag?" said Mr. Buckingham with fine indignation. "This is the solution of a murder case. I wanted you two to be here for the arrest."

"Murder?" said Captain Buckingham. "What murder?"

"Fellow called Andrew Noble."

The captain screwed up his brow. "Noble?" he said. "Noble? Wasn't that the fellow Brannigan sent some dame to see you about?"

"You fool," said the lieutenant, "Brannigan was kidding you. There's nothing there. Have you dragged us out of bed for that? Have you—"

"Shut up," said Mr. Buckingham with authority. "Shut up and listen. Moreover, no one is to move until I give the order. Is that understood?"

THE CAPTAIN and the lieutenant stared at him much in the manner of Eisenhower hearing an acting corporal tell him precisely what was what. Mr. Buckingham paid no attention whatever. He moved over to the door which led to the living room, and put his ear to the lower panel. Like sheep, the three of us followed suit. None of us knew why.

We heard a door slam in the other room, the sound of footsteps and an expression of alarm, apparently from Mrs. Barton. Then, unmistakably came Dreiland's voice.

"I told you what would happen if you talked, didn't I? Did you think I was kidding?"

Mrs. Barton made a sound like a frightened sob. She spoke rapidly, her words tumbling over each other.

"I didn't talk. I didn't tell anyone anything. Even that funny little man—" I looked down to see Mr. Buckingham's

ears crimson. "I never said a word to anyone. Put that gun away. I can't stand having a gun pointed at me. I—"

The captain and the lieutenant put his hand on the doorknob. Mr. Buckingham angrily brushed it off.

"No move without my orders," he whispered.

The lieutenant desisted. From the living room Dreiland spoke again.

"You were going to talk. You promised that midget you'd talk this morning, you damned old hag. I've got to put you out of the way and it's going to cause me one hell of a lot of trouble. Well, damn you, here it comes."

Simultaneously with the crackle of a shot, Mr. Buckingham twisted the doorknob and burst into the other room. Mrs. Barton, fat and gray-haired, lay across the bed howling to the heavens in a hysterical voice for help.

Dreiland, gun in hand, stared for a stupefied moment at Mr. Buckingham, then turned his thirty-eight on him. Mr. Buckingham did not hesitate. He moved on in like a platoon of Marines. Again Dreiland fired, this time, I thought, point blank at Mr. Buckingham. Mr. Buckingham did not veer an inch.

At a point some three feet from the muzzle of Dreiland's gun muzzle, he sprang like a steel spring. Dreiland fired again as Mr. Buckingham clutched his wrist with both hands. He clung with all his strength, lowered his head, and sank his teeth into Dreiland's wrist.

I stood staring at the tableau, absolutely astounded that Mr. Buckingham was still alive. It seemed to me that at least one of Dreiland's shots was aimed dead at my employer's breast. And back of it all something vague and undefined stirred at the back of my mind. Something seemed screwy. I didn't know what it was. I just sensed it.

Dreiland uttered a howl of pain and his thirty-eight dropped thuddingly on to the

thick-napped rug. Mrs. Barton ceased her supplication to heaven and stared with dripping eyes at Mr. Buckingham.

"He was going to kill me," she moaned. "You've saved my life."

"Indeed I have," said Mr. Buckingham as he took Dreiland's wrist from his mouth. "Captain, Lieutenant, will you take care of this man?"

The elder Buckingham brothers had been as transfixed as I. Gladly they moved in, seized Dreiland by each arm. The captain looked at Mr. Buckingham admiringly.

"Guts," he said. "You've got guts. I've seen damned few regular coppers who could keep on going right into revolver fire."

The lieutenant nodded in affirmation. Mr. Buckingham beamed. He bowed like an actor.

"Courage," he said sententiously, "is not a matter of size. It was a matter of saving this poor woman's life. I know my duty."

He was being sickeningly smug. As I watched him smirking, I again became aware of that vague sense of something wrong. I brought all my brain cells into play to try to capture it.

"Now," said Mr. Buckingham, "I will stay here for a moment with Mrs. Barton. You three will take Dreiland downstairs. You will wait for me in the living room. Senator Browder is expected shortly. You will keep him there until I arrive."

The Buckingham *frères* conducted Dreiland down the stairs, and they did not handle him like Dresden china. I followed along. In the vast living room, the lieutenant deposited Dreiland roughly in a chair and turned a pair of shining eyes upon the captain.

"Did you see him?" he asked. "Did you see the little runt? No gun, no nothing, and he charged right in. Guts, that's what he's got."

The captain nodded. "Blood will tell,"

he said. "The littlest Buckingham, has as much moxie as the biggest. Maybe more." He looked at me and frowned suddenly. "I'm not worried about his nerve," he continued. "It's what's going on in his head. What's he got figured on this case, Latham? What's it all about? Is he doing all right?"

"Ask me about the Einstein theory," I pleaded. "Maybe I can tell you something about that. As regards Mr. Buckingham's foray into the world of crime, I know less than nothing."

THERE was the sound of a purring motor outside. A door opened and footsteps sounded in the hall. A moment later Senator Browder strode into the room. He saw the two police uniforms and it seemed to me his face fell. He observed Dreiland, scowling and pale, seated with the lieutenant's hand firmly on his shoulder. He turned his roving gaze to me and registered frank distaste.

"What's wrong here?" he asked, and his affability was a trifle forced. "What are you policemen doing in this house?"

It was a difficult question since, beyond the fact of Mr. Buckingham's summons, neither the captain nor the lieutenant had the slightest idea why they were here.

"Mr. Buckingham is working on that Noble affair for you," I told him. "I believe he has the case just about cleared up. Dreiland, here, took a shot at him."

The senator looked as if he had just lost an election. "Took a shot?" he repeated. "My word, I—"

He broke off as Mr. Buckingham strutted into the room. His walk was somewhat suggestive of a turkeycock essaying the goostep. Smugness dripped from him. He clocked his heels, bowed before the senator, and looked very much like a cat who has just swallowed a particularly succulent canary.

"Senator," he said, "I have the mystery in the palm of my hand."

"Mystery?" barked the senator. "What mystery? I merely asked you to corroborate the fact that Noble had jilted my daughter and run out of town."

"There is much more to it than that," said Mr. Buckingham. "Sit down and I'll tell you about it."

There was an arrogant note in his tone which the senator was unaccustomed to. He glared at Mr. Buckingham. He said, "Send me your bill and I'll pay it. In the meantime, get out of the house."

Mr. Buckingham met the senator's gaze squarely. He said, authoritatively, "Sit down."

The senator did not move. The captain, his eyes still shining with the pride of his brother's valor, said in his best precinct house tone, "The gentleman asked you to sit down."

The senator blinked and sat.

"Now," said Mr. Buckingham with the air of Sherlock Holmes about to give the dunderheads of Scotland Yard a lesson they wouldn't forget, "let's begin at the beginning, which concerns two insults, both directed at me. One from the police department, the second from you, Senator Browder."

The representatives of the police department and the senator looked at him earnestly.

"First," went on Mr. Buckingham, "there was Marcia Weldon, a helpless girl who called on the police for help. They refused to give it to her. They sent her sobbing out into the street. Jeeringly, they told her to come to me, believing I was an imbecile who couldn't solve the crossword puzzle in a tabloid newspaper."

Mr. Buckingham stopped, took a long cigar from his pocket and lighted it. He was laying it on with a trowel and thoroughly enjoying himself.

"So Miss Weldon, in her sorrow, comes to me. She tells me that Andrew Noble failed to keep an appointment to marry her. She is worried. She fears foul play."

Browder stared at him. "You mean Noble had a date to marry the Weldon girl at the same time—the same time as—"

He had trouble finishing the sentence. Mr. Buckingham came to his rescue. "The same time as he had an appointment to marry your daughter? Yes, Senator, that is true."

"What's this all about?" asked the lieutenant. "How can he have dates to marry two women at the same time?"

"We will get to that in a moment," said Mr. Buckingham. "Next, I want to take up the second insult offered to me. This time it came from the senator."

"How? When? How did I insult you?"

"By retaining me," said Mr. Buckingham.

"That's ridiculous," said the captain.

"The senator," said Mr. Buckingham, "is a man of influence. The commissioner would have extended every aid to him. There are a dozen well known private agencies in town. Yet he comes to me. Why? Because he thinks I'm the most inept sleuth in the business. Because he figures that if there is one man in all the world who will never figure out where Andrew Noble is, it's I."

"You mean," asked the lieutenant, "that Browder didn't really want to know what happened to Noble?"

"He already knew."

I noted an exchange of glances between the senator and Dreiland.

"You see," went on Mr. Buckingham, the senator wanted a report from a private detective attesting to the fact that Noble had jilted his daughter and run away. He thought I'd give it to him and let it go at that. He wanted it for two reasons. First, his daughter pressed him to undertake an inquiry, and retaining me would satisfy her. Second, in case anything came up later it'd make the senator look good. Hell, he hired a private dick, didn't he?"

"This is all very well," I said, "but do you know where Noble is now?"

"Certainly. He's in the rear garden. About thirty yards behind the house."

"Then bring him in," said the captain. "Let's hear his story. Bring him in at once."

"If you bring him in," said Mr. Buckingham, "you'll need a shovel. He's some four feet beneath the surface of the earth."

Dreiland gripped the arm of his chair.



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"You see," said Mr. Buckingham, "I visited Noble's apartment. While there, this Dreiland came in, claiming he was Noble. He was dressed most flashily. He wore three rings. Two big and blatant. One a small diamond, gracefully cut. He also wore a Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain. From his speech it was obvious that he had as much right to that key as I have to a size ten shoe.

"But I knew Noble was a Phi Bete. I reasoned that perhaps Dreiland had taken the key from Noble, perhaps, too, he had taken the less sparkling ring. Dreiland seemed like a man who couldn't resist jewelry. I figured then that he probably had come to the apartment to make off with any other valuables he could find. A quite safe proceeding, since he knew Noble was dead."

Browder stared at Dreiland. There was no benignity at all in his gaze.

"Then," said Mr. Buckingham, well aware of the awed attitude of his brothers, "I came across several sheets of note-paper in the wastepaper basket. They gave the impression that Noble was having great difficulty in phrasing a letter to a girl called Katherine. Knowing what I did, from the senator and the Weldon girl, it seemed clear that he was trying to write Browder's daughter, breaking off his engagement."

The senator cleared his throat and at last found his voice. "This is poppycock! If this man is making charges, let him make them."

MR. BUCKINGHAM bowed. "Very well, I shall make them. At last Noble came to you, told you he was going to break his engagement, that he had arranged to be married to someone else. You quarreled violently with him. You killed him."

"Killed him? How did I kill him? Why did I kill him?"

"How I shall leave to the medical men

at the post mortem. Why, I shall answer. Noble could swing a heavy labor vote. You figured on that for the next election. You figured with him in the family you were safely reelected. Your whole career was predicated on the marriage of your daughter and Noble. When you knew it wouldn't work you ran amok."

"You can prove this?" asked the captain.

"Not yet," said Mr. Buckingham. "I expect Dreiland to turn state's evidence."

The senator picked up a little. "Oh," he said, "you do?"

Mr. Buckingham nodded. "I'm sure he will. Upon my arrival here I discovered that Mrs. Barton, usually a gay creature, had taken to sobbing and praying recently. I wondered why. I found out that her window overlooked the rear garden. I found out, too, that the night Noble apparently had disappeared was a night of full moon. I went out into the rear garden and looked around. I saw some carefully replaced sod in a direct line with the housekeeper's window. I was certain she had seen something, probably Noble's burial."

Again the senator's hot eyes were on Dreiland, who avoided his gaze.

"I questioned her," said Mr. Buckingham, "but she denied knowing anything. Obviously, she had been threatened. She seemed scared to death. I wired the senator that she was going to clear up the case. Coincidentally, a little while later, Dreiland arrived. That same night he made an attempt on Mrs. Barton's life. Then, I knew I was right. Still, Mrs. Barton wouldn't talk."

"Then," snapped Dreiland, "what evidence have you got?"

"She has talked now," said Mr. Buckingham sweetly. "In gratitude."

"Gratitude?" I said. "For what?"

"Didn't I save her life?" demanded Mr. Buckingham. "At the risk of my own, didn't I dash in and grapple with Dreiland?"

The Bigger They Are

land? Mrs. Barton was duly grateful. She told me she saw Dreiland bury the body. Dreiland noticed her at the window, came into the house and threatened her with death should she ever talk."

"Then how do you pin it on the senator?" asked the captain.

"Oh, Browder killed Noble. There's no doubt of that. He merely handed the burial job over to Dreiland, who couldn't resist stealing the dead man's jewelry."

"The housekeeper has no evidence against me," said the senator hoarsely.

Mr. Buckingham smiled broadly. "No," he said. "That's why I'm so sure Dreiland will turn state's evidence. Mrs. Barton's testimony ties him up with the corpse."

The senator sagged back in his chair. A gleam of hope came into Dreiland's eye.

"Now," said Mr. Buckingham to his brothers, "will you kindly remove these felons while I go back to town and take off these damned clothes?"

The captain and the lieutenant stood before him humbly. "You have a brain in your head," said the captain. "I apologize for my attitude about your going into business."

"A brain?" said the lieutenant. "What about his guts? Did you see him charge that guy? Mr. Buckingham, you're terrific. If I ever hear a copper laugh at you again, I'll slug him."

They escorted the senator and Dreiland from the room. Mr. Buckingham strutted into the hall and telephoned a taxicab. I watched him musingly. I was still aware of that vague sense at the back of my head that something was wrong.

"Well," I said, as we waited for the hack. "I'm taking my girl down to the beach."

Mr. Buckingham eyed me severely, "Oh no you're not."

I let a silent minute slip past, then said, "Where's the gun?"

"What gun?"

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New Detective Magazine

"The gun you took from Dreiland."

"Oh, in my pocket. I forgot to hand it over. I'll take it to the police station tomorrow."

"Let me see it."

"Why?"

I met his eye squarely. He squirmed a little. "Listen," I said, "do you think I don't notice the difference between the sound of blank and ball ammunition?"

Mr. Buckingham swallowed something in his throat. His face crimsoned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that when I saw you in the hall last night you'd been in Dreiland's room. You'd taken the ammunition out of his gun and reloaded it with blanks. Then you told him deliberately that Barton was going to tell all. You figured he'd rush right upstairs and shoot her. He did. You leaped in and rescued her. First, so that she'd be appreciative enough to talk, second to impress your brothers and myself."

Mr. Buckingham bit his lip.

"So you have time to take those other blanks out of the gun before you turn it in. That's why you 'forgot' it."

"Latham," he said, "far be it from me to interfere with romance."

"You mean," I said, "that I can have Saturday off?"

"Well—er—yes. Of course, Latham. By all means. Naturally, in return, I expect that—"

"My lips are sealed," I said. "Wild horses, Japanese torture, could not drag my secret from me."

The taxi pulled up at the door. The driver regarded Mr. Buckingham with interest. As we climbed inside, he said with great interest, "Say, I knew a dwarf once. He was—"

"I am not a dwarf," said Mr. Buckingham severely. "If you had any knowledge whatever of eugenics you would know—"

I thrust my fingers in my ears. This was a speech I knew by heart.

Night Before Murder

(Continued from page 68)

Police whistles were blowing out in the darkness beyond the rear window. From other windows around the backyard that had been slammed up, shouts; and running feet and the whistle blasts down the alley. Out on the street in front there was the scream of a police siren, wailing, stopping.

The great city. The multimillion-eyed and eared, the multimillion-voiced great city. The red lightning had struck with a great roaring thunder this time, not in silence. All around those who feared and waited was the hunting cry.

But the hunters knew they'd not get Tim Gilruple.

She clung to the old deaf landlady in the dim-lit basement hall, and now the tears came, and the weeping. The faces pushing in the door, the visored caps with shields on, the curious or consoling neighborhood women.

And Detective-Sergeant Higgins, Mr. Higgins, George, who had looked so much like Grandfather Turner in the pictures when grandfather had been young and had married grandmother, so courteous and other-worldly, but fierce to fight the city gang. Mr. Higgins, George, with his delicate hands and kind, reflective eyes. She would have liked to have talked with him and danced with him and got to know him a little better that night the beginning of the nightmare.

And since. Though Tim had made her think that Mr. Higgins was annoyed with him for marrying her, and thought her a little fool.

But it was over now. It was over, and she'd no more to fear.

"Not tonight," Mr. Higgins said, "a girl named Dora. Not tonight, and never. I had a feeling about him, a police instinct, but I just couldn't believe. But now the nightmare's over, Dora.

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 73)

front pages you'd learn an awful lot."

Now I saw, and took a deep breath. "And the eleven hundred?"

"Was for you. A truck for you, I was saving for. So you could be in business for yourself, and wouldn't have to punch the clock. Ma knew I was driving, but we were scared to tell you, the way you've been."

"Sounds very fine," the cop said, "but I'm afraid it would sound better if the lieutenant heard it."

"Beat it," I said. "Go someplace and blow your whistle. You're not taking my brother anywhere."

"Peter—" Mama said.

The phone rang.

"That would be for me," the cop said, and went over to pick up the phone.

"Right," he said, and "Oh—I see. Admitted it? Let's see, that would be next door. Makes sense, all right. Sure, I'll run over and talk to his folks."

He hung up, and faced us. He didn't look comfortable. "A—a Christy Sanchez admitted finding that bankbook, and admitted being a member of the gang that robbed that house. Said he left it behind on purpose. Had some kind of grudge against your brother." He looked at me. "That would be you."

I didn't say anything.

He shook his head. "I don't know what's the matter with these kids."

"Christy hasn't a dad," I said. "When you're ready to go down, with the Sanchez's, I'd like to go along, officer."

"All right. I'll drop back." He went out.

"Manny," I said. "Oh, Manny, baby."

"It's all right, Pete," he said. "You work hard, and it's been rough. But for gosh sakes, don't—ah, Pete."

But I couldn't help it. I was crying. And Pete was crying and Ma too. It was wonderful.

Cipher Solvers Club

Cipher Solvers' Club for November, 1949

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 3410; *Case Ace, 1287; *Alphamega, 565; *Amoro, 578; *Andem, 426; *Attempt, 879; *Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 293; *See Bee Bee, 282; *S. H. Berwald, 1082; *Alpha Bet, 1897; *Florence B. Boulton, 573; *Gold Bug, 1776; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4049; *Carso, 2029; *Bessie Casey, 725; *Clara, 3695; *R. C. C., 583; *Floyd E. Coss, 1779; *M. E. Cutcomb, 605; *Kay Dee, 778; *Honey Dew, 193; *Drol, 2238; *M. E., 3596; *Eve Eden, 1419; *Engineer III, 1919; *Arty Ess, 4042; *Estace, 1949; *Eve, 494; *Femo, 533; *Diana Forrest, 152; *LeRoy A. Gundry, 1605; *Gus, 242; *Gyrene, 453; *Henry J. Hawecker, 2937; *Hayrake, 1519; *T. Hearnly, 3611; *Henty, 1105; *Jack-Hi, 1228; *Han, 355; *Jaybee, 1448; *Jayel, 1161; *Jim, 89; *June, 619; *Kate, 2998; *Betty Kelly, 653; *S. A. L., 555; *J. E. L., 462; *F. Mack, 351; *Marcia, 1253; *M. J. Martinson, 76; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3402; *Lee A. Miller, 1956; *Gum Muer, 114; *Mossback, 2611; *Walter K. Newman, 11; *Ella Nohr, 87; *Les Noyse, 11; *Pablo, 300; *Ray F. Richer, 1555; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1551; *Alice Routh, 3963; *Rush, 438; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3136; *Kay Vee See, 1708; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1708; *H. Silverman, 255; *Logan Simard, 1217; *Harold R. Smith, 33; *Isoudough, 301; *Sam Spiegel, 2823; *M. G. S., 1961; *Jack-Stay, 3873; *Tchenut E. Taylor, 435; *Miss Tick, 396; *Tos, 290; *Tskyrre, 1274; *Arlene F. Vaughn, 334; *Volund, 2038; *Leona Watts, 11; *Ruth E. Weiss, 427; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 521; *Arthur Whitfield, 500; *James H. Williams, 923; *Ike N. Wynne, 3594; *Doctor X, 4085; *Yarbie, 1108; *Zirvab, 209.

Ten Answers—Arnie, 30; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 448; *Ray Boyd, 183; *A. E. Cusick, 49; *Doc V., 17; *Marguerite Gleson, 624; *W. Hawthorn, 10; *Heleny, 65; *Jayemem, 304; *Lucile E. Little, 2192; *H. F. Pool, 283; *H. C. Retherford, 286; *U. Solv'm, 522; *Nick Spar, 3362; *Wes, 190.

Nine Answers—Mrs. J. David Hawkins, 31.

Eight Answers—Conortion, 15.

Five Answers—Jaybar, 9.

Three Answers—N. H., 3.

Cipher Solvers' Club for January, 1950

Current Grand Total: 990,126 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Case Ace, 1299; *Alphamega, 577; *Amoro, 590; *Andem, 427; *Carl Andra, 12; *Attempt, 891; *Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 295; *See Bee Bee, 2828; *S. H. Berwald, 1093; *Alpha Bet, 1908; *Florence B. Boulton, 585; *Gold Bug, 1776; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4061; *Carso, 2040; *Bessie Casey, 736; *Ciphernut, 3707; *R. C. C., 694; *Floyd E. Coss, 1791; *M. E. Cutcomb, 617; *Kay Dee, 790; *Honey Dew, 204; *Gunga Din, 887; *Drol, 2250; *M. E., 3597; *Eve Eden, 1430; *Engineer III, 1931; *Arty Ess, 4053; *Estace, 1955; *Eve, 505; *Femo, 544; *LeRoy A. Gundry, 1017; *Gus, 242; *Gyrene, 475; *S. R. Hart, 833; *Hayrake, 1530; *Henty, 1116; *Jack-Hi, 1229; *Jaybee, 1460; *Jayel, 1172; *Jim, 109; *June, 631; *Kate, 3009; *Betty Kelly, 675; *S. A. L., 566; *Sport Ln, 68; *J. E. L., 473; *Florence Mack, 363; *Marcus, 1294; *M. J. Martinson, 87; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3413; *Lee A. Miller, 1967; *Gum Muer, 126; *Frank Morris, 637; *Mossback, 2622; *Walter K. Newman, 23; *Ella Nohr, 88; *W. F. P., 3198; *B. E. L., 1308; *Ray F. Richer, 1566; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1563; *Alice Routh, 3973; *Rush, 439; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3147; *Kay Vee See, 1720; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1720; *H. Silverman, 266; *Logan Simard, 1228; *Harold R. Smith, 45; *Isoudough, 313; *Sam Spiegel, 2834; *M. G. S., 1972; *Jack-Stay, 3885; *Geraldine Taber, 32; *Tskyrre, 1286; *Volund, 2038; *Leona Watts, 92; *Ruth E. Weiss, 449; *Hwe, 302; *Arthur Whitfield, 512; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 533; *James H. Williams, 935; *Ike N. Wynne, 3605; *Doctor X, 4097; *Zirvab, 220.

Ten Answers—A. D. Walters, 10; *Tot, 300; *Miss Tick, 396; *Nick Spar, 3372; *U. Solv'm, 532; *H. C. Retherford, 276; *Lucile E. Little, 2200; *Jayemem, 315; *Heleny, 75; *Mrs. J. David Hawkins, 11; *Diana Forrest, 162; *A. E. Cusick, 50; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 458; *Arnie, 40.

Nine Answers—Conortion, 24; *H. F. Pool, 303; *Yarbie, 1117.

Five Answers—Jaybar, 14.

Corrections—*N. Dak. Ump, 11 Answers for Nov., 1949, and Geraldine Taber, 10 for Nov., 1949, not previously credited.

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 8)

After weeks of work, the Secret Service discovered the source of the new crop of bogus bills: Moyamensing Penitentiary, Arthur Taylor and Baldwin S. Bredell, engravers in the Philadelphia-Lancaster case, had made new plates while serving time!

Alvin Hollin,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Here's something on the case of a famous English strangler:

Dear Editor:

Few murder cases of modern times have excited more interest than the Mills affair in England some years ago. John Frederick Mills was found guilty of strangling his landlady, Ellen Cotter, and sentenced to be hanged. But he won a reprieve unique in the annals of crime: the authorities found that "it would be impossible to hang him in a humane manner." Mills had only one leg and was subject to epilepsy; doctors declared that the mental anguish of the approaching execution would cause him to have a seizure on the gallows!

Harold Knight,
Columbia, South Carolina

In the so-called good old days, it was very often a case of "Death makes a holiday:"

Dear Editor:

For centuries, a public hanging was a gala affair—second only to the county fair in excitement. But the children of middle-class English parents dreaded to see an execution day roll around; it was long the custom for God-fearing fathers to whip their sons and daughters at the time of every public execution, in order to impress upon the children a horror of the gallows!

Not even a three-ring circus created such a stir as the old-fashioned public hanging. The citizens made every execution a holiday. Large crowds were quite common, but something of a record was set on December 5, 1831, when John Bishop and Thomas Williams were hanged in London. Some 40,000 turned out to see the execution and were so eager for front-row places that 14 persons were crushed to death.

Fred Lindley,
Los Angeles, California

It looks as though we've done our time for this issue, crime fans. We're at the end of our stretch as far as space goes. But we'll be with you soon again.

—THE EDITORS.

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EVERY OUTDOOR WORKER
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We furnish **EVERYTHING** you need to start selling quality leather jackets at once—and to build a fine profitable ever-growing business for yourself. **DON'T** just "WISH" for independence. **FORGET** worries and uncertainties! Get set now for big earnings in your own business, backed by this 46-year old million-dollar company—Leader in its field!

WE SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE MONEY FROM VERY FIRST HOUR

You get complete **FREE SELLING OUTFIT!** We furnish How-to-Do-It instructions that help you take orders the very first hour—make good money from the start! You get Proved Selling Aids—a Book written from the practical experience of 5,000 Successful Salesmen—the monthly newspaper gives hard-hitting ideas, proved successful in the field—Customer Gifts that bring "Automatic Sales"—everything to help you cash in **QUICK!**



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Make plenty of **EXTRA** money with popular, fast-selling full leather lined Chukka Boots and scores of other fine footwear styles with this wonderful Velvet-eez comfort feature! Cradles feet on thousands of tiny air bubbles, rests feet while you work or stand. Over 150 different styles for men, women, with Velvet-eez and other comfort, and style features. Full line of sport, work and dress shoes. Make extra money with sport line of shirts, raincoats, sport jackets.



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Mason's VELVET-EEZ shoes awarded the Good Housekeeping Seal. This ends hesitation. Helps you sell more customers more items. You make more money when you handle this great line and enjoy the support of the institution people depend on for Guaranteed Satisfaction.



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Whether you devote only SPARE TIME or give your FULL TIME to this work, it is easy for Wilknit Salespeople to get orders. Selling Wilknit Nylons is not like selling anything you ever sold before. Wilknit Nylons are covered by the most amazing guarantee your customers have ever heard. Your customers can wear out their hose. They can develop runs. They can even snag and rip them. **No matter what happens to make Wilknit Nylons unwearable...within NINE MONTHS...depending on quantity...we replace them free of charge under the terms of our sensational guarantee!**

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LOOK AT THESE EXCEPTIONAL EARNINGS



FOR SPARE AND FULL TIME

Mary McPherson, of Pittsburgh, Pa. never sold before. Gets a car as a bonus—in addition to her earnings—in less than 180 days. F. M. Sachs, New York, gets new car in 2 months. Mrs. Robert Franklin started out with me and made \$54.40 the very first week. Mr. Codman of Rhode Island did even better. His first week's

earnings amounted to \$63.57. Mrs. Pete Dickson of Ohio made \$51.32 her first week out and H. DeLalloche of Calif. made \$68.34 for his first week's earnings. Space permits mentioning only these few exceptional cases—but they give you an idea of the BIG MONEY that is possible in this business in the VERY FIRST WEEK!

Get FACTS Quick

You can carry a wide selection of newest shades, nines, lengths, and gaudes in genuine Nylon. You carry socks for men and hose for children, too. If you are looking for a business that you can call your own—

business that has a prospect in every home or office—a prospect in every last man and woman REGULARLY year in and year out—a business where it's easy to earn extra bonuses—your choice of NEW CAR or FUR COAT—plus your big daily profits, then let me hear from you quick.



**FACTS FREE! SEND NO MONEY
JUST SEND NAME**

When you send for Selling Outfit, I send your choice of Nylons or Socks for your personal use. Rush your name for facts about this sensational line of guaranteed hosiery for men, women and children. BE FIRST in your locality. Mail coupon or a penny postcard now. **L. Lowell Wilkin**

"Thanks for the New Ford
in addition to that, my commissions for 2 months amounted to \$1,007.60."

"I am happy to have won the car in two months. My commission for two months totaled \$1,007.60. I have earned as much as \$50 a day and \$30 a day commissions have not been unusual. It is a high privilege to represent Wilknit Hosiery Co."

Frank C. Schulz



**SEND NAME
AND
HOSE SIZE**

**L. LOWELL WILKIN
WILKNIT HOSIERY CO., Inc., 439 Midway,
GREENFIELD, OHIO**

Please rush all facts about your guaranteed hosiery, money making plan and Bonus offer of Free Car or Fur Coat. Everything you send me now is FREE.

My Hose Size is _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ Zone _____ STATE _____

WILKNIT HOSIERY CO., INC., 439 Midway, Greenfield, Ohio